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"I hope they
don't think I'm
limited to
being a neo-
soul artist."
—Chrisette
Michele



**V CHECK
OUT WHAT'S
POPPIN' AT
VIBE.COM
THIS MONTH:**

INTERACTIVE audio and video:

R. Kelly on tape.

TALKING SMACK with champi-
onship boxer "Pretty Boy" Floyd
Mayweather Jr.

A MESS OF NEW BLOGS from Sean
Fennessey (RapidShare), Humanity
Critic (The Nappy Diatribe), Janelle
Grimmond (You're So Dramatic) and
more...

PLUS off-the-chain party photos,
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Photographed by Barron Claiborne on
February 15, 2007, in New York

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at a career crossroads.

*By Ben Detrick. Photographed
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CHAMILLIONAIRE, **SLIM
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Soryngour*

This One



D6CQ-P5D-CYWE



"It's hypocritical to support the war and not want your kids to be involved in it."
— Congressman Charles B. Rangel

Photographed by Dana Lixenberg
on February 10, 2007, at Rangel's
office in Harlem, N.Y.

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From left:
Wish,
Layzie, and
Krayzie

"Everybody love Bone, but why don't people respect us like they love us? It's a slap in the face."
— Krayzie Bone of Bone Thugs-N-Harmony

Photographed by
Stephanie Pfriender Stylander
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"That's just my swag.... I could make pajamas look saucy." — Mistah F.A.B.

Photographed by
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WRITERS Amanda Andrews, Jennifer Bar, Lauren Blessingsame, Tanell Carr, Shires Carol, Theron Cook, Fabiola De Abreu, Risa Dixon, Sabrina Ford, Kamika Fulwood, Jameelah Hardin, N'neka Hitt, Hannah Hodson, Danielle Houston, Alexis Jeffries, AJ Johnson, Janel Jones, Tasheka Josephs, Brenton Land, Shydia Lilley, Jamia Montgomery, Sahar Parthok, Shaiya Robinson, Donald Semerville, Mark Sundstrom, Nickia Williams



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Published by VIBE Media Group LLC

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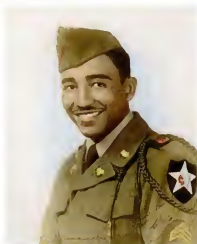
EDITOR'S LETTER

We are so busy
working on
VIBE.COM ~~and~~ I have
no time to write
my editor's note.
So for all my
opinion and

feelings about
this issue,
R. Kelly, and
everything else,
go to VIBE.COM. My
ed note's up there
right now. Later,
(shaw)



(Clockwise from Top)
Dania Ramirez,
Robert Kelly, and
Charles Rangel.





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HOT DOG WITHOUT EVERYONE FREAKING OUT?

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THE GUEST LIST

Here at VIBE, we've got lots of CDs from established and aspiring artists. Fortunately, Associate Music Editor **Sean Fennessey**, 24, who edits our NEXT and Revolutions sections, never minds listening to a few extra tunes. "I once downloaded 376 songs produced by Timbaland in one night," says the author of the Rapid Share blog at VIBE.com. All that effort paid off when he sat down to assess *Timbaland Presents Shock Value* (Mosley Music Group/Blackground/Interscope) for this month's lead Revolutions review (page 113).... Be sure to check out the other blogs on VIBE.com: **Danyel Smith** (Everything Is Everything), **Rob Kenner** (Boomshots), **Benjamin Meadows-Ingram** (Boss On Deck), **Laura Checkoway** (I Write Checks), **Keith Murphy**

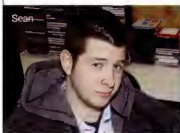
reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, digs deeper into why it's taken so long for Kelly's child-pornography case to come to trial ("Unfinished Business," page 76).... **Mark Letinwalla**, 24, a sports writer



Miles



for the *New York Daily News*, squares up with Floyd Mayweather Jr. ("Beats By The Pound," page 96). Bone Thugs-N-Harmony poses ("Live Another Day," page 88) for **Stephanie Pfriender Stylander**, 42; she also photographs for *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*, and *People*.... **Miles Donovan**, 30, illustrates Houston's finest ("Still Tippin'," page 92).... And for those looking to let loose this spring, **Leon L. Brittain**, 37, of *AutomotiveRhythms.com* checks out the flyest motorcycles in the game ("Who Ridin'?", page 45).... Just try to catch us riding dirty.



Sean

(*Black On Black Crime*), **Linda Hobbs** (Grindin'), **Damien Scott** (Whips And Chips), **Chris Yuscavage** (Where's My Ball?), **Janelle Grimmerd** (You're So Dramatic), **Shauna Barbosa** (Cashmere Thoughts), **Butta** (Vibe Confidential), **George Kelly** (VWire), **Humanity Critic** (The Nappy Diatribe), and **Mark Anthony Neal** (Critical Noir).... R. Kelly graces VIBE's cover for the seventh time, as **Abdon Pallasch**, 41, a legal affairs

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05.07

VIBE RATERS

THE VIBE STAFF RATES YOUR MONTHLY SLAM

RAPPIN' 4-TAY, FEAT. MESSY MARV, SAN QUINN, SEGG THA GAFFLA, & BIG RICH, "Live From the 415," from *That's What You Thought* (Bagman/SMC):

The Fillmore all-stars at their best: classic mob sound, with 4-Tay steering at the helm

Katie Patterson, Researcher



ROSCO P. COLDCHAIN, "Summer Breeze," independent single (myspace.com/pcoldchain):

Long on the sidelines, Coldchain's now out of prison and laying his uncomfortably poetic flow over a goody, glorious Seals and Crofts flip.

Sean Fennessey, Associate Music Editor



B.O.B., "Cloud 9," from his upcoming as-yet-untitled album (Rebel Rock/Atlantic): *B.O.B. delivers one of the most infectious tree-hugger anthems since Afroman's "Because I Got High." Give this joint some burn on your iPod and zone out.*

Damien Lemon, Manager of National Music Advertising & Marketing

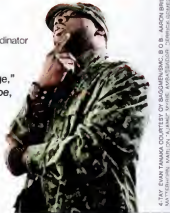


TONY MATTERHORN, "Goodas," from *Dancehall Draft Picks 2007* (VP): *Mr. "Dutty Wine" is back and better than ever on the "Gully Slime" riddim. The title isn't as "dutty" as it seems... think "good-ass" rather than "good ass."*

Rob Kenner, Editor-At-Large

AASIM, "Go," independent single (myspace.com/grindmusicinc): *Finally! Dope hip hop from a New York MC*

Will Perkins, Events & Artist Relations Coordinator



BLITZ THE AMBASSADOR, "Change," from his upcoming *Suicide Stereotype, (Reprisal):*

Not only is this track militant enough to be an '07 election theme song, but with its revolutionary slant, it'll resonate with hip hop heads young and old.

Melissa Thermod, Traffic Manager



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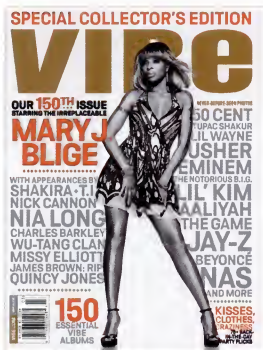
*Available MyGIG in-dash design DVD capability is not available in all states. See your dealer for details.

† Always drive carefully, consistent with conditions. Always wear your seat belt and obey traffic laws.

‡ As shown, \$25,865. MSRPs exclude tax.



MAIL



WELCOME BACK, MARY

The March 2007 Cover [Special Collector's Edition, 150th Issue], featured, yet again, a blond Mary J. Blige (who blamed you for her Afghan hound look on your December 2005 cover). Her stylist clearly dogged her more than you could have. Far worse, there were large captions for Eminem, Nia Long (an article discussing her ASS-ets, none the less), and Lil' Kim — but a minimal farewell to the Godfather of Soul, James Brown. Am I the only one who remembers that hip hop is based upon samples (borrowed or stolen) from the late James Brown? Remember when it wasn't a shame to say, "I'm Black and I'm



Proud"? I guess you're just stuck on being "Black and I'm BLING." More unfortunately, you reneged on an opportunity to educate and elaborate. On a brighter note, I hope Mary is happy with her "white-chick" cover.

Troy Davidson
via e-mail

subscribers who look forward to the positive VIBE of your magazine.

Haleem Miller
White Deer, Pa.

TIP OF THE TONGUES

Thanks for the Native Tongues article ("The Love Movement") by Keith Murphy, February 2007 Issue). As a person who sincerely loves soul music, theirs, collectively, has made my life special in the way that Armstrong, Gillespie and Monk did for my grandfather, and the way that Ray Charles and Booker T. Jones did for my dad. The Native Tongues have sketched a place in our hearts and minds. I look forward to reading more articles like this.

Terry Wilson
Brooklyn, N.Y.

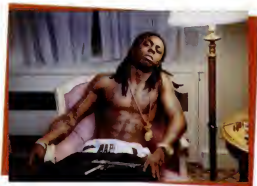
Awesome cover.

Gregory Prescott Photography
myspace.com/vibemagazine

Great cover; Mary looks really nice.

CAS
myspace.com/vibemagazine

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“I'M A REAL NEW YORK CHICK...I GO TO GUNFIGHTS AND KNIVES OVER MINE. WE AIN'T THE LOST ONES. WE THE BOSS ONES.”
“I'VE READ THAT KEYSHIA COLE THINKS MULTIPLE PARTNERSHIPS AIN'T SEXY. MASSIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE REAL SEXY — HELL YEAH.”

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Finish line



limited edition

Willie Moore, Jr (P-Dub) R&B/Hip-Hop Artist

Creating music with healing power is quite a task in today's hip-hop genre. P-Dub knows that he has to draw from personal experiences to continue to create next level music. Let the critics construct their categories, music is made so people feel good—essentially, their own personal therapy. P-Dub feels the same way about his Gillette Fusion razor. He knows that the Gillette Fusion razor was made for the next level man, which serves as his motivation with every shave.

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VOLUME

MASTERING THE CULTURE AND THE LIFESTYLE — ONE PAGE AT A TIME

Vato Loco

Carlos Mencia is Honduran-born and East L.A. Mexican-raised — so while he may not be blood-related, don't think he's going to hold his tongue this Cinco de Mayo.

Why does everyone love Cinco de Mayo? [I always understood it as a celebration for a Mexican battle in which Mexican forces defeated the French occupational army]. But for me as a kid, it was just a day where everybody got to go to a school and dressed like an Aztec. Today it's kind of like St. Patrick's Day. You wear something a little Mexican, enjoy dollar margaritas, and have fun. Don't try to get all too serious about it, especially if you're white or you're one of those liberals who says, "I want to learn more about the Cinco de Mayo holiday — I've never experience it." That's not the kind of holiday it is! Pour the margaritas. That's all you need to know! And don't bother learning about the Mexican part of it. Hell, Mexicans don't know the Mexican part of it. It's 25 cents for a Corona. That's it, man. Enjoy.

As told to Keith Murphy

The third season of Mencia's hit series, *Mind of Mexico*, airs Sundays on Comedy Central (10 p.m. EST).

VSCREEN

Photographed by JOE TORENO on February 10 in Los Angeles

VIBE.COM 31

COVER: JEFFREY MAYER; STYLING: JEFFREY MAYER; HAIR: NICOLA MAYER; MAKEUP: MICHAEL WAGNER

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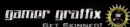


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With more than 125 million registered users, MySpace has become the world's sixth most popular Web site, packed with more random folks posting more random this 'n that than can be found in many small countries. But your people's people aren't the only ones posting bizarre ish online. Take a minute to dig through the digital dirt of some of your favorite artists — you never know what you might find

JUST BLAZE

THE PAGE:

myspace.com/justblazeradio

THE BASICS:

Superproducer who cemented his name sketching *The Blueprint* for Jay-Z.

THE WEB GEMS:

Just is a renowned technophile, so his site has all sorts of treats. Months before Jigga jumped on it, you could catch the "Kingdom Come" instrumental banger in broadband. These days you can find a clip of a skit about the making of "Show Me What You Got" (involving a light saber), an in-studio grammar argument with Saigon, and a version of the Beastie Boys' "Ch-Check It Out" featuring characters from the video game *Jak X*. Believe that.



GILLIE DA KID

THE PAGE:

myspace.com/figga4lifeent

THE BASICS: Philadelphia MC once signed to Cash Money Records, now beefing with Lil Wayne over ghostwriting credits.

THE WEB GEMS:

Gil's profile is one giant ode to Lil Wayne. Not only do you get dis songs like "Frontin Like Ya Daddy," but also a clip of the widely circulated spoof "Make-Up Sex," in which animated characters of Weezy and Baby profess love for each other.



SALAAMREMI.COM's Blurbs
About me:



SALAAM REMI

THE PAGE:

myspace.com/salaamremi

THE BASICS:

Veteran producer known for the Fugees' "Fu-Gee-La" and sample-heavy street tracks like Nas' "Made You Look."

THE WEB GEMS:

Footage of Remi performing a strange, rambling "Spike Lee monologue" over a soft jazz backdrop. Shot with a distorted effect and extreme close-ups, it's peppered with touching lines like, "I and I. You and you. Us both and you both making we both." The clip's enough to bring tears to your eyes. For his sake.



TURF TALK

THE PAGE:

myspace.com/turttalk

THE BASICS:

Bay Area rapper who also happens to be E-40's cousin.

THE WEB GEMS:

A clip taken from Turf Talk's appearance on a 2005 episode of *Judge Joe Brown*. Locked in a dispute over damages to a SUV belonging to a former female friend, Turf Talk mouths off to the judge and a tongue-twisting standoff ensues. "I got a devastating mouth-piece, mayne," Turf boasts. "Sounds like your game is quite lame," counters Judge Joe before ordering Turf to pay \$4,945 in damages. Really?!?!?!

Ben Detrick



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Cat Power

The Pussycat Dolls' Nicole Scherzinger is one of the hottest women on the planet. Just don't tell her that

What's your fantasy? Making her your girlfriend? Or simply watching Nicole Scherzinger, 28, the front woman of the Pussycat Dolls, making it pop — her career, that is? After turning heads in 2001, when she won a spot in girl group Eden's Crush on the WB's American Idol predecessor, Popstars: USA, the Hawaii-born, Kentucky-bred, Filipina/Hawaiian/Russian stunner joined Los Angeles-based burlesque troupe the Pussycat Dolls in 2003. Interscope's Jimmy Iovine and Ron Fair were in the process of reconfiguring the Dolls as a surefire supergroup, and Scherzinger was cast as HPIC; she's the only Doll with songwriting and vocal credits on the group's platinum-certified debut, PCD (A&M/Interscope, 2005). Now she's readying her solo debut, Her Name Is Nicole (A&M/Interscope), and though there's no denying that Scherzinger is a dime, she doesn't always feel like one.

Joining the Pussycat Dolls was hard for me because I wasn't used to that image. I was like a naive little flower from Hawaii and the South. Everyone sees me as a sex symbol, but that's just the Pussycat Doll inside of me. Scherzinger has a plethora of people inside of her. I don't want to sound schizophrenic, but when I'm not onstage I wear slippers, no makeup, hair down, like a flower child.

This business is so shaky. That's what scares me, but that's what makes me push harder. When you're in this business, it's like you're training for the Olympics. It's all about going, 'cause once it stops, I don't know what I'm doing and I'm lost. [Interscope Geffen A&M Chairman] Iovine told me that Bruce Springsteen told him, "Thank God we've got insecurities; they've gotten me this far."

If we were doing an insecurity article, I could be the queen. Growing up, I felt like the only way I could be happy with myself was if someone else loved me. I've always attached myself to people because that's where I found my love. I've got a lot of insecurities about the way I look. That's why I work out so much. And I'm always comparing myself to other people, wondering if I'm good enough. But you gotta learn to accept yourself, because this is what God gave you. You gotta have perspective, like, Man, Nicole, who are you to be feeling this way? Pick yourself back up again. As told to Laura Checkoway

"I'VE GOT A LOT OF INSECURITIES ABOUT THE WAY I LOOK. THAT'S WHY I WORK OUT SO MUCH."

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Jimmy breaks
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The Chinese Connection

JOHNNIE TO makes some of the best gangster movies you've never seen

You want G shit? Try kidnapping your rival's underlings, chaining them to German shepherds, putting them in small cages, and, when they won't bend your way (even after being beaten senseless with a sledgehammer), taking a cleaver to one of 'em and feeding the ground-up leftovers to the dogs. That's exactly what icy-calm gangster/businessman Jimmy (Louis Koo) does in *Triad Election* (Tartan, 2006), the sequel to the award-winning Hong Kong gangsta flick, *Election* (Tartan, 2005), both by director Johnnie To. The films are like *The Godfather* and *The Godfather Part II* in Chinese, and, needless to say, the guys crouched in the cages come around — with the quickness.

One of the most prolific and accomplished Hong Kong directors shooting today, To has been filling Chinese cinemas since the early '80s with a catalog of films ranging from pleasant romantic comedies (2001's *Love on a Diet*, Milky Way) to Hong Kong cop action flicks cast

In the John Woo mold (1988's *The Big Heat*, Tai Seng). But it's To's recent work, on films like *PTU* (Milky Way, 2003) and *Breaking News* (Palm, 2004), that honed a vision that's measured, slick, and, at times, stunningly chilling.

Triad picks up two years after the original *Election*. China's notorious underworld society (The Triad) is once again choosing a chairman, and the fight for the top spot is typically brutal and unforgiving. But whereas *Election*, which won the Hong Kong Film Award for Best Picture, paraded a cast of characters across the screen in a scramble for the post, *Triad* is more focused, centering on the struggle between two leaders: Lok (Simon Yam), who refuses to turn over power as per tradition, and Jimmy, who's pulled into the fray to further his commercial interests. Sure, *Triad* takes some patience — it lags at times, and the soundtrack is a little cheesy — but in an era of constantly disappointing Hollywood fare, the payoff, and the payoff, are priceless. **BMI**

Release Therapy

Christopher "Cannon" Mapp, 22, from the excellent new documentary *The Hip Hop Project* (THINKFilm), talks about hip hop as a healing art



Brooklyn-based outreach program The Hip Hop Project has been encouraging teenagers to share their struggles through song since 1999. What did you get out of the program? It was the first time I expressed what I was going through, taking care of my mother with multiple sclerosis. Before, I'd never shared something so personal. I learned about self-discovery and ethics — keeping your word, integrity — and that it's important to get what you feel internally...out.

What was the biggest challenge you faced while filming the documentary? I lost my mom. When that happened, I had to reaffirm, re-evaluate, and rediscover myself. I'd wanted to be successful at music to get her the best doctors. When she passed, the whole mental portrait that I'd painted was smeared. Writing about it pulled me back to life. Where would you be today without the program? I would've been locked up, going nowhere. You don't usually hear about hip hop changing lives — how it gives people who were silent a voice. But there would've been nothing else to help me heal.

Laura Checkonay

Note to Self: Clown Bruce Willis for allegedly turning down the op to film a sex scene with Halle Berry in their new cat-and-mouse film, *Perfect Stranger* (Sony), because he was too intimidated by her amazing good looks. Instead, both actors got down and dirty by their lonesome before the scene came together in the, um, cutting room.



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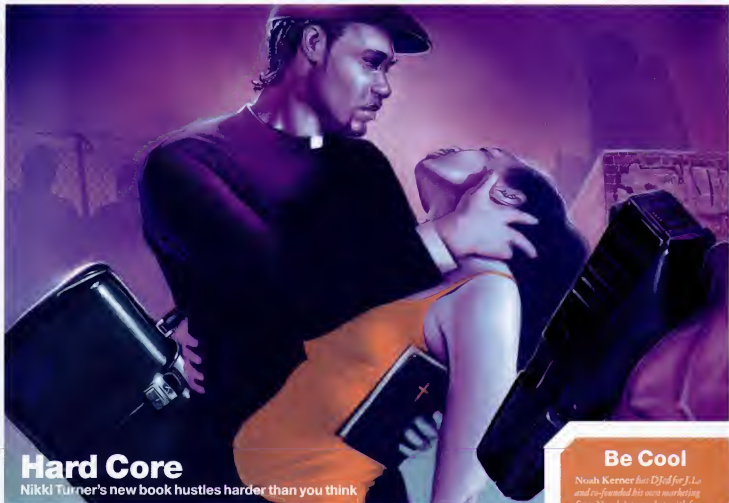
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Hard Core

Nikki Turner's new book hustles harder than you think

The language is unapologetically raw, the characters are hardly sympathetic, and the books are near universally disdained by literary purists. But what street lit lacks in technical know-how and critical acclaim, the genre more than makes up for with its biggest marketing tool: drama.

And few writers working in the field today bring the drama quite as dramatically as Nikki Turner. The so-called Queen of Hip Hop Fiction is a master at weaving juicy, 'hood-rich sagas of revenge, regret, and redemption; her fifth novel, *Forever a Hustler's Wife* (One World), delivers on all fronts. *Forever* finds recurrent character Yarni Taylor, a successful lawyer and put-upon wife of Richmond, Va., kingpin Des, grown up and grown tired of the *bullshit*. Trying to accommodate his alarmingly loyal better half — Yarni stood by him during a 10-year prison bid — Des hits upon a new

grind: peddling prayers in the pulpit instead of product in the 'hood. But getting out of the game, of course, isn't going to be easy. And so the story goes.

Like most of street lit's most popular writers, Turner is a female author specializing in giving an intimate voice to the ladies so often overlooked in hip hop and in more male-focused street tales like HBO's *The Wire*. In these arenas "the grind" is male-dominated, with women usually dismissed as pawns and/or arm candy. But in most street lit, bold, beautiful, clever, sexual women take center stage. Looking beyond the flashy allure of women who entangle themselves with men who have money, power, and respect, Turner reveals the daily hardships many wives, girlfriends, and daughters endure while trying to love men — of all walks of life. It isn't pretty. And it isn't poetic. But maybe that's the point.

Demetria Lucas

Be Cool

Noah Kerner has *Dj'd for J.Lo* and co-founded his own marketing firm. Now he's teamed up with former *Barney's* New York co-CEO Gene Perreault for the new book *Chatterbox Cool: Standing Out in Today's Cluttered Marketplace (Atria)*, which seeks to help companies, products, and artists sharpen their edge. We asked him to put those sales *no work on life's most important commodity: you*.

- 1. DO YOU UNDERSTAND** what's going on, but never become a slave to trends. As Russell Simmons told us, "Walk the street, see what's going on, and spit it out in your own way. Don't do it because you research it; do it because you breathe it."
- 2. DON'T MAX OUT** The key to anything relevant is a healthy dose of mystique. As Christian Aguilera said, "Going to parties is time spent in the public eye, which means out of the public's imagination. And everyone loves a fantasy."
- 3. TAKE RISKS** Whatever you do, be willing to face the possibility of real failure. It's the only way to find real success.

Money Talks

One more reason why you've gotta respect Donald Trump's G

"...the true definition of success can never be measured in dollars and cents,"

writes Trump in his intro to Russell Simmons' new book, *Do You: 12 Laws to Access the Power in You to Achieve Happiness and Success* (Gotham). Good try, big dog, but we don't buy it. See ya in the Hamptons.

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Buying a 50 percent stake in the swap meet: roughly \$245 million

Ballin' status:

3. KHMER BRODAL SAREY AT LONG BEACH KICK BOXING

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"He has to stay in shape. He's already good at kicking, but now that he's got all that money, Becks is going to have to learn how to start kicking asses. I take lessons at this [Cambodian] kickboxing gym in Long Beach. They beat my ass and get me into shape."

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Ballin' status:

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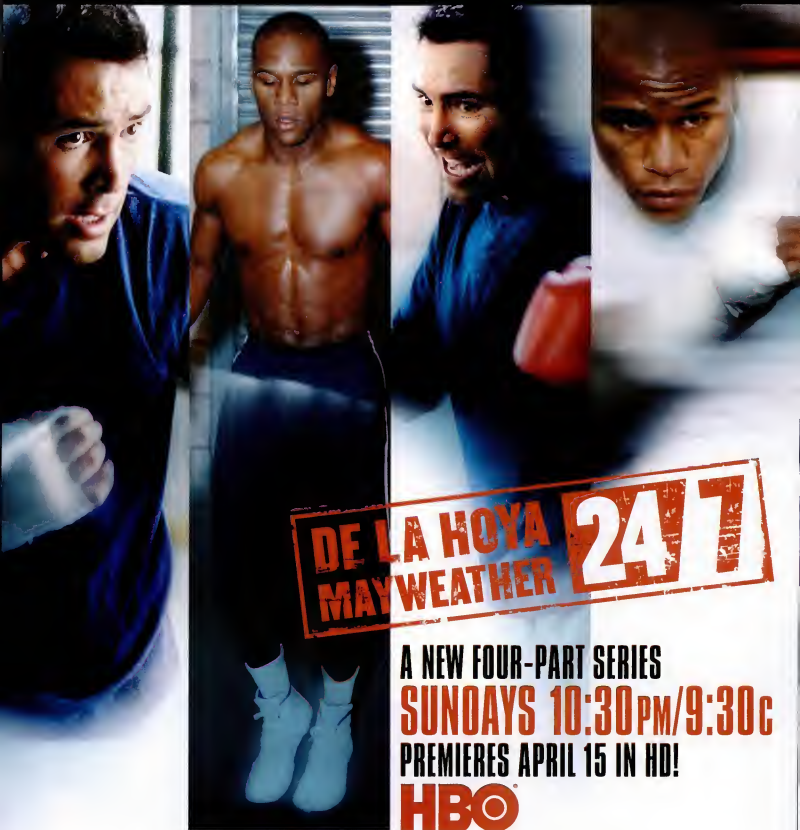
"Finally, if David Beckham is coming to Los Angeles, he has to pay his 'hood tax. Plus, the best way rich people show they're rich is by giving money away. He should give some to this organization, which tries to increase the peace and give gangbangers a chance."

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Age: 26

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Boasting a fly-by-wire electronic throttle developed for Yamaha's M-1 MotoGP, improved power delivery with the world's first electronic variable-length intake funnel system, and an all-new Deltabox frame and swingarm, the R1 is a bike that's both fast (180hp, 998cc engine) and furious. Starts at \$11,600; yamaha-motor.com

2007 BUELL FIREBOLT XB12R

Buell's XB12R delivers power and excitement suitable for everyday riding or track use. The 1203cc V-Twin revs to 6,800 rpm while pounding out 103hp and 84 ft. lbs. of torque. But it's the design that sells. With the fuel tank and oil reservoir tucked into the swingarm, the bike has a lower center of gravity, so you can effortlessly hit the curves. \$10,500; buell.com



2007 DUCATI 1098 S TRICOLORE

Italians know how to make bikes. Ducati makes Italian bikes great. The Tricolore — representing the red, white, and green colors of the Italian national flag — sports the same specifications as Ducati's 1098 S, the most powerful and lightest L Twin on the market (160hp, revving 9,750 rpm), plus a 102dB Termignoni racing muffler kit with dedicated ECU (for racing use only). Perfecto! \$25,000; ducatiusa.com



2007 SUZUKI GSX-R1000

Fourteen pounds heavier than its predecessor, Suzuki's '07 track model delivers dual exhausts, a new instrument cluster including a digital LCD speedometer, dual trip meters, and a new LCD engine mode indicator displaying the various performance settings: standard, sport, and wet. How fly is that? \$11,400; suzukicycles.com

Leon L. Brittain

2007 MV AGUSTA F4-1000R

MV Agusta revamped the engine and the suspension and brake package to offer a 998cc engine with new valves and pistons, a radial braking system, forged Brembo wheels, and new Marzocchi forks. The price to chill on this 174hp work of art? A modest \$23,000; mvagustausa.com



street dreams

1

The Dragon U.S. 129, Maryville, Tenn.

GOT SKILLS? Put them to use on quite possibly the most famous motorcycling road in the U.S. Resting near the border of North Carolina and Tennessee, the Dragon offers 11 miles of 318 tight and sweeping curves that coil up and down the Great Smoky Mountains — an asphalt course both challenging and beautiful. But be warned: The Dragon is known to eat those who aren't up to the task. For more information on motorcycle events and road conditions, check dealgap.com.

L.L.B.



The debut novel from a New Orleans rap legend... "C-Murder keeps it TRU his first time out the gate!"

—K'Wan, bestselling author of *Gangsta*

"From the projects to the State Pen, straight with no cut...this is as real as it gets. You can stamp this 'Hood Certified'!"

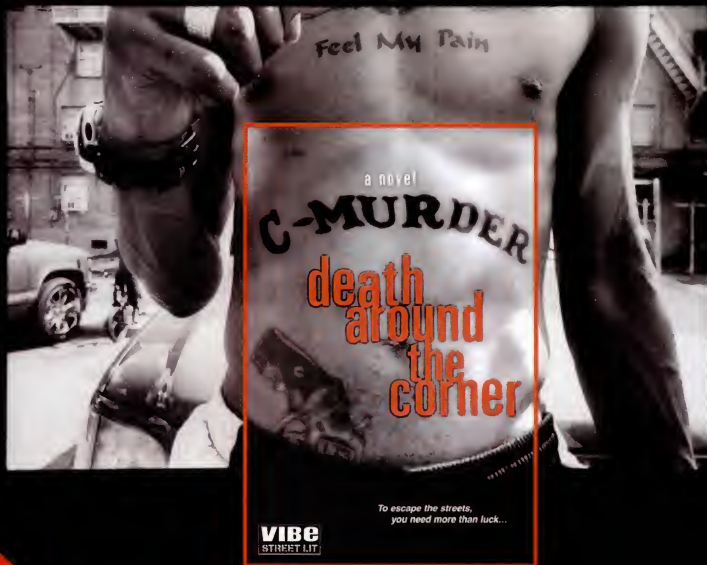
—KaShamba Williams, bestselling author of *Grimey*

"If you've never experienced N'awlin's, you will after reading *Death Around The Corner*"

—Kwame Teague, author of *The Adventures of Ghetto Sam*

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—B.L.U.N.T., author of *A Dead Man's Vengeance*



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 The shell's Structural Net Composite is built for the road. Starts at \$609; araimerics.com



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 The look and safety of a full-face helmet with open-face accessibility. Starts at \$463; shoei-helmets.com



HJC AC-12 Carbon
 Carbon-fiber construction keeps this top-of-the-line helmet super-lightweight. \$420; hjc Helmets.com



Go-Getta

A bike so fast, Kawasaki put the brakes on the boasts

Speed kills. So fast that in 2001 the motorcycle industry informally agreed to limit street bike speeds to 186 mph. Of course, that hasn't slowed down the competition. In 2006, Kawasaki dropped its Ninja ZX-14, and while the company won't advertise that the bike's 190hp engine makes it the quickest production sport bike on the market, don't think it isn't gassed. Starts at \$11,600; kawasaki.com D.S.

THREE-WHEEL MOTION

The Can-Am Spyder roadster is the flyest tricycle — ever

1 It took Canadian sports motor company BRP — inventors of the snowmobile and the sit-down water ski — 11 years to make a ride built for the road, but the Spyder's track-proven Rotax 990 V-Twin engine and standard five-speed manual or optional clutchless thumb-shift tranny (both offering true mechanical reverse) were worth the wait.

2 To keep you safely planted to the pavement, the Spyder comes loaded with a bevy of safety ECUs (electronic control units) — including vehicle stability, traction-control, and stability-control systems — to guard against rollover.

3 At the heart of the Spyder's Y architecture — two wheels up front, one in the rear — is BRP's SST (Surrounding Spar Technology) steel center beam design, which creates a lower center of gravity for better cornering and handling.

4 In keeping with the roadster mentality, the Spyder sports a double front A-Arm suspension system up front — the same suspension found in most of today's luxury and sports cars. The forward cargo space is also big enough for a backpack or two helmets. What else do you need?

Damien Scott



Street Dreams

2

Pacific Coast Highway U.S. 1, Monterey to Morro Bay, Calif.

When drivers dream, they dream of this road. While the entire PCH, which stretches from San Juan Capistrano to near Leggett, Calif., offers some of the most breathtaking views you'll find on any road, any place in the world, it's this 121-mile span of rolling hills, waterfalls, redwood forests, valleys, and coastal mountains that truly stuns. But don't drift off while enjoying the scenery; there are a number of twists, climbs, and descents that require rapt attention.

L.L.B.





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FORGIVABLE

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UNSTOPPABLE?

Tennessee Titans star Pacman Jones, Doug E. Fresh and Shane of the HHGL show their love as Eric V. wins the HHGL title two years in a row.

At the 2007 HHGL Celebrity Finals, Eric V was once again crowned the Hip Hop King of Video Games. The event, held at the

Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, was part of BET's Back to Basic Bash during NBA All-Star Weekend. Between performances by Rich Boy & Akon, the HHGL finalists took the main stage. Eric V (of The Baka Boys), looking for a quick victory, found opponent Pacman Jones (Tennessee Titans) to be anything but a pushover,

with a final score of 38-39. Despite Jones' real life skill on the gridiron, he was unable to stop the undefeated master Eric V. Will the nationally syndicated hip hop DJ three-peat? Can he ever be stopped?

Eric V. vs. Pacman - Finals



The HHGL Championship prize package includes: The custom HHGL Championship Belt (designed by celebrity jeweler Han Cholo), industry-wide bragging rights, a case of BG7 (NBA Player Ben Gordon's energy drink), and the exclusive H3 TV System. The H3 is a 46" LCD flat screen entertainment system designed to support the ultimate gamer with dual console integration for simultaneous split screen viewing, which permits gamers to play Xbox and PS3 at the same time.

Murs vs. Pacman - Semi-Finals



Couldn't get a ticket? Check out HHGL.com to see all the clips of the performances and appearances by Jazzy Jeff, Mims, Rich Boy, Ludacris, Tyrese, Akon & more. Log in to get in.

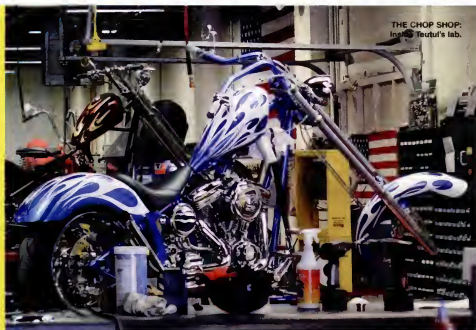


Superstars Just Blaze and Ne-Yo battle for the highest stakes of their careers. Go to hhgl.com to see who won... and what!!

www.HHGL.com

The center for hip hop and videogame competitions. Log in to get in.
Exclusive videos, articles, interviews, photos and more.





THE CHOP SHOP:
Inside Teutul's lab.

CHOPPER CITY So, you're a big dog and you want a big bike. We understand. Before you customize your ride, take some advice from *American Chopper's* Paul Teutul Jr.

VIBE: What's the first thing to consider when you're getting a bike made?

Paul Teutul Jr.: Well, you gotta think about frame style. You got either a soft tail or a rigid one. The rigid...always looks nicer. But if you want to go a longer distance, the soft tail will be easier on you. It's got shocks, so it's easier to ride.

What about the engine?

If you want something for everyday riding, go with a lower horsepower; I'd suggest a 100-inch motor. They're still fast — faster than a novice wants to go on a chopper — but it's a little more reliable. And if you're not mechanically inclined, you definitely want to go with a more tame motor, because if you have carburetor problems, you could tinker with it yourself. If you get a big motor and you don't know what you're doing and you've got carburetor problems, it can be a nightmare.

How important is the transmission?

A five speed is good enough for a novice. But people go with six speeds so they can have that cruising gear. If you're going to be doing a lot of highway driving, you might want to consider a six speed.

And as for tires?

A lot of guys go with 300 rear tires. In my opinion, 240 tires ride noticeably better. The wider the tire gets, the more you lose in handling, because the bike wants to stay going straight. But if you're getting a wider rear tire, you're going to want to go with a wider front tire. So if you get the 240 or the 300, I would recommend you get the 31/2-inch front tire.

As far as customizing bikes, what should people know in terms of price?

[Laughs] The more you spend, the more you get. D.S.

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L.L.B.

Street Dreams

3

Skyline Drive Shenandoah National Park, Va.

Peak performers head to this picturesque stretch of 105 twisty miles, riding the crests of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. Beginning in Front Royal, Va., and winding through Shenandoah National Park to the Blue Ridge Parkway, Skyline Drive offers lush scenery packed with wildlife: mainly curious deer and the occasional black bear. Great for cruisers and sport bikes alike. For more information, check api.gov/shen. L.L.B.



50 VIBB.COM

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Raising The Bar

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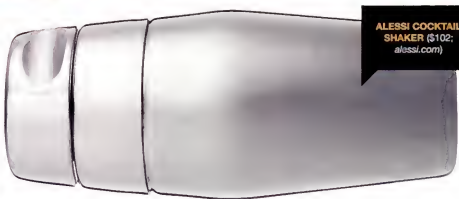
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The New Gold Standard

Remember yellow is only one color in the rainbow



1

Pamela Froman's "Alternative Crush" 18k yellow- and natural white-gold ring (\$2,460; pamelafroman.com)

2

Avianne & Co. 14k rose-gold chain and 18k white-gold chain (shown as one piece, \$3,675; \$8,150; avianneandco.com)

3

Rotenier 18k pink-gold pretzel cuff links (\$3,600; rotenier.com)

4

Cartier Trinity Ring in 18k rose-, yellow-, and white-gold (\$1,275; cartier.com)

5

David Yurman Chevron Cross Enhancer in 18k (price available upon request), with box chain in 18k (\$2,390; davidyurman.com)

6

Cartier Knot Cufflinks in 18k rose-, yellow-, and white-gold (\$2,400; cartier.com)



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THE WATCHES

Clockwise from top: HUBLOT Big Bang St. Valentine watch (\$2,900; hublot.com); U-BOAT Night Vision automatic watch (\$3,850; u-boatwatch.it); ZODIAC Super Sea Dragon watch (\$275; zodiawatches.com); TAG HEUER Link automatic steel watch (\$2,450; tagheuer.com); ESQ SWISS Blackfin Swiss quartz movement watch (\$550; esqswiss.com)

CLASS IS IN SESSION

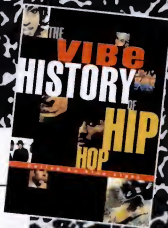
Subject

Hip-Hop 101

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UNBELIEVABLE

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and Afterlife
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By Oliver Holbert Carter

A VIBE BOOK

Talk To Her

The Sopranos' Dania Ramirez screams for attention — without saying a word

Forget walking the walk. All actress Dania Ramirez needs to do is talk that talk. And what talk it is — a smoky, rough-around-the-edges whisper, two parts Punta Cana and one part Bronx. "When they say 'action,' I don't have any boundaries," the Dominican Republic-born, Jersey-raised scorcher purrs over salad at NYC eatery Whym. "I like to be exposed — that's why I'm an actress."

And that's why we watch. From Big Pun's 1998 "Still Not a Player" video to her turn as the flyest evil mutant ever in 2006's *X-Men: The Last Stand* (20th Century Fox), Ramirez brings a perfect balance of delicate beauty and a sexy, from-the-block something to every role. Take Spike Lee's *She Hate Me* (Sony Pictures Classics, 2004), in which she ravages Kerry Washington in a girl-girl scene best termed, um, hands on. "We went through lesbian boot camp," Ramirez murmurs between bites. "But Kerry's hot, so it wasn't that difficult."

What is difficult is waiting for her to slink across the silver screen again: first in the forthcoming John Singleton-produced drama *Illegal Tender* (New Deal), then in her fiancé Jessy Terrero's thriller, *Brooklyn to Manhattan* (Hallway, 2008). Fortunately, there's the final season of *The Sopranos* (Sun., 9 p.m. EST, HBO). As Blanca, the sultry older girlfriend of wet-behind-the-ears AJ, she's simply, as she says, "too much for him to handle."

"Showing off your femininity is part of being a woman," says Ramirez, who's also working on an album with Luny Tunes affiliate Nely. "It's funny 'cause I'm usually a tomboy. I love to drink beer, watch football. But at night, I like to dress up, put on makeup, and be a sexual being." You don't say.

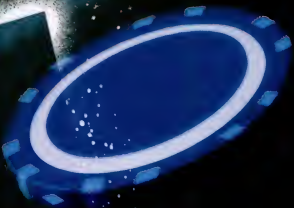
Alex Gale



White swimsuit dress by NORMA KAMALI; bracelets and ring, all by LIA SOPHIA; prescription sunglasses by CEBASÉ PACIOTTI

Go roll. Go double down. Go large. Stop less. Go more. Go Greyhound.

G



www.letsgodog.com





Guadalupe Lopez and her daughter, Bronx bombshell **Jennifer Lynn Lopez**, strut their stuff in Berlin in 2003.



Leslie Burrell melts the Icebox where her son **Omarion** "Grandberry's heart used to be while in NYC in 2006.

MOMMA, I MADE IT

With one sharp glance, or rising tone in her voice, Mom can turn the toughest gangsta into a little boy or the flyest diva into a bratty baby girl all over again. She pushes your buttons — and has your back — like no one else. In hip hop, where machismo reigns, and women are too often objectified,

Mom somehow remains a touchable high atop her pedestal. As Tupac reflected on 1985's "Dear Mama," "There's no way I can pay you back. But the plan is to show you that I understand."




Jennifer Randall Timberlake and **Lynn Collins**, my choice as Mom in Orlando in 1998.



Once upon a time, not long ago, **Richard "Silek Rich" Withers** plants one on his mom, **Veronica Walters**, NYC in 1992.



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VMIX MOMMA, I MADE IT



Mahalia Hines has watched her son **Lonné Rashid "Common" Lynn** grow from Chi-town B-boy to big-time actor.



HEY MA: Fredericka Giles spit a verse alongside her son **Cameron "Cam'Ron" Giles** on his first album.



Debbie Phillips knows that all thugs need hugs: her son **Jason Jerome "Jedakiss" Phillips** included.



A peep! **Donna West** with her very proud baby, **Kanye West**.



"She's the sweetest lady I've honestly never heard her raise her voice," **Jose Antonio "Fat Joe" Cartagena** says of his abuela, **Tati Castro**. "She's the backbone of my whole family."



Mama! and knock you out: **James Todd "LL Cool J" Smith III** with his mom, **Andrea Smith**.



Bryan "Baby" Williams is stuntin' like his mommy, **Patricia Williams**.



THE MOGUL AND HIS MOM: Sean John "Diddy" Combs and **Janice Combs** stay in the spotlight.



"Me and my momma always been top-team partners," **Darryl Kevin "DJ Serappy" Richardson II** says of **Deborah Bryant**.

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Sergeant James Jamerson

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TAKE ACTION AT www.SaveDarfur.org

THE VIBE SPOT

DODGE AVENGER AND VIBE MAGAZINE HOST LEBRON JAMES AND JAMIE FOXX ALL-STAR PARTIES

All-Star Weekend is a celebration that allows fans from around the globe to experience the thrill of the world's greatest basketball players in action. Las Vegas was the host for NBA All-Star 2007, but not all of the action took place on the hardwood floor. The All-New 2007 DODGE AVENGER, VIBE and promoters MARC & TAZ came together for two of the hottest events to hit the strip. NBA All-Star, LeBron James hosted the red carpet affair on Saturday while Academy Award winner Jamie Foxx, rounded out the weekend by hosting the Sunday night bash.



(1) The All-New 2007 Dodge Avenger, so fresh and so clean. (2) NBA All-Star, LeBron James. (3) Jamie Foxx and friends. (4) Audra Soong interviewing Chris Rock's brother, Tony Rock in the Avenger. (5) Party crowd. (6) James McNulty (President & CEO/Fuel Detroit), Dominique Woods (Dodge Events Coordinator/GlobalHUE-Detroit), Len Burnett (Vice President/Group Publisher of VIBE), Michelle Bonamy (Dodge VP, Associate Media Director/PHD-Detroit), and Danielle Hodge (Dodge Product Specialist). (7) Jamie Foxx making his much anticipated entrance. (8) Partygoers take a minute to smile for the camera. (9) Partygoers. (10) Actor and DJ, Idris Elba. (11) Chauncey Burton, Marketing Manager of VIBE poses on the red carpet with long time friend Joelle Dennard. (12) Actor Tony Rock throws up a fighter's stance. (13) Perfect for Everyday Superheroes.



NEXT

Artists on the Verge

On a chilly winter evening, in the kitchen of her parents' Lithonia, Ga., home, Keri Hilson is on her third try at a successful batch of Country Time Lemonade — and it's still not up to her standards. "It's not tangy enough," says the 24-year-old singer and songwriter of hits like Mary J. Blige's "Take Me As I Am" and Omarion's "Ice Box." "Maybe another scoop of sugar?"

But before this sweet-faced perfectionist was playing in the kitchen between recording sessions, the former Emory College theater major had it rough, surviving the failure of two girl groups (Pretty Toni, masterminded by producer Anthony Dent, and D'Sign) and also nearly losing her life. Weary from classes, long nights in recording studios, and rigorous rehearsals, Keri nodded off at the wheel one night nearly four years ago. Her car flipped over on Atlanta's busy Freedom Parkway. "The accident changed my pace," she says. "And taught me that quality is more important than quantity."

Impressed by her work ethic and her tenacious attitude toward recovery, Dent appointed her as his in-house writer, which quickly led to collaborations with artists like Usher, Ciara, and T.I., as well as producer Polow Da Don. Polow introduced Keri to Timbaland, and the superproducer signed her to Interscope, then moved her to his Mosley Music Group. Her debut, tentatively titled *In A Perfect World* (MMG/Interscope), will be released later this year. *World* has range: The beguiling "Get Me Off (The Bench)" is a metaphor for both her passion for basketball and her decade-long struggle as a singer, while "Happy Juice" is a backwoods juke-joint jam celebrating her favorite cocktail, Hennessy and apple juice.

"I make my music from real situations," says Keri, who writes and works with a songwriting team called The Clutch. "[This album] is all about how women really feel." But it's her quest for perfection that keeps her grounded. "I'm very far from where I wanna be," she says, finally drinking her lemonade after she's gotten it right. "I hope I never feel like I've made it."

Isoul H. Harris

Keri

OUT ON THE COURT AT LAST,
THIS SINGER IS GOING TO SHINE

By **Chris Nashawaty**
Photos by **David LaChapelle**
Styling by **Michelle Williams**

BASS LINE

Looking at some of the artists who are gearing up to record new albums, you might swear you were back in the 1990s, sporting Cross Colours and watching the latest episode of *Martin*. It has to start with **MICHAEL JACKSON**, the onetime King of Pop, who's working on tracks with will.i.am for yet another comeback album, reportedly due later this year. The Black Eyed Peas front man ►►►



Collie Buddz

BLAZING FROM BERMUDA TO JAMROCK AND BEYOND

The first time Collie Buddz set foot in Jamaica, the Bermudan dancehall singer rolled to ladies' night at Club Asylum in New Kingston. While he stood at the back of the local hotspot, the selector put on Collie's "Mamacita" and challenged the crowd to guess what the artist looked like. "People was talking about, 'He's Rastaman,' or 'He's a Chineyman,'" Collie remembers with a laugh. But when the pale-faced lyricist stepped on stage? "Everybody gone mad."

Unsurprisingly, Dino Delvalle, the veteran A&R rep who signed Collie (né Collin Harper) to Sony, had a similar reaction. "Eminem and 50 Cent's attorney [Theo Sedimay] said he had a white reggae artist who was hot," says Dino, who has since left Sony to manage Collie. "Being Jamaican, I was ambivalent at first. But when we met, his accent was mad thick, and the first song he played was something that he wrote and produced. I was on the floor."

Collie, 25, landed the deal even though his breakthrough, "Come Around," an old-fashioned ganja anthem built from a Zap Pow horn sample, was still a year away. "If you're making decent music then people don't really watch the color," says Collie. "But I definitely have a tiny bit more to prove than somebody else might."

So how did a youth who looks like David Beckham end up sounding more like Buju Banton? Born in New Orleans, Collin lived in Toronto until he was 4, when his father died. Collie and his brother Matthew then moved to their mother's native Bermuda, where they were raised. Matthew, aka Smokie, established a reggae sound system called Herbalist Supreme. Collie, who earned a degree in audio engineering, soon fell into the family business and began recording.

Approval has come quickly for Collie—he's received crucial cosigns from Massive B and David Rodigan, and a "Come Around" remix featuring Busta Rhymes is currently in rotation—but he says his own goals are humble. "I wanna leave my mark in the reggae industry," he says. "I'm not looking to be too big with it—just a respected artist in the industry." For Mr. Buddz, finally the respect come around.

Rob Kenner

has described the record as a contemporary take on Jackson's 1979 classic *Off The Wall* [Epic]. It will be the first project from MJ since 2001's lukewarmly received *Invincible* [Epic]. J Records head Clive Davis hopes to revive the career of another superstar as he heads into the studio with **WHITNEY HOUSTON**. Reps for Davis tell **VIBE** that recording hasn't started, but certified hitmakers Ne-Yo and Akon will reportedly be contributing songs. On >>>

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NEXT

Mistah F.A.B.

BAY AREA MC WANTS YOU
TO GET ON THE BUS

Photographed by **Chris McPherson**
on February 12, 2007, in Los Angeles

Amid the drab furnishings of Oakland's One 4 All Barber & Hair Salon, a decades-old Donkey Kong arcade console sits in one corner, and two dusty, neglected peanut vending machines sit in the other. Emerging from the drizzle on a dreary winter afternoon, East Bay rapper Mistah F.A.B., 25, waltzes in wearing Bulgari shades, limited-edition Nikes, and a T-shirt featuring his own countenance air-brushed in bright primary colors, lighting up the room. "That's just my swag," he says. "I could make pajamas look saucy."

Thanks to his ostentatious style and rhymes, F.A.B. signed his indie label Faeva Afta to Atlantic Records in September. The *Ghostbusters* theme-sampling "Ghost Ride It," his bubbling new single, has taken off, thanks to an irreverent video getting airplay on MTV. His new album, *The Baydestrian* (SMC/Fontana/Thizz Nation), was released independently as a precursor to November's major label debut, *Da Yellow Bus Rydah*.

"*The Baydestrian* is gonna have the hyphy hyphy that radio's promoting," F.A.B. says. "*Da Yellow Bus Rydah*'s is my commercial album. The whole stigma of Bay Area artists is that [people] feel only Bay Area people will like [them]. With these albums, I'm proving that to be untrue." F.A.B. has long toed the line between thizzing MC and soul-bearing artist—consider the confessional "Worries," from his debut *Nig-Latin* (Straight Hits, 2003), which described his mother's drug addiction, his brother's incarceration, and the death of his father, a renowned local pimp, from HIV. Now he says he needs to put it all together to become a rap idol.

"I'm learning how to cater to the 25-and-under [set]," he says. "If I can establish being one of their favorites, then I'll be to them what E-40 and Too Short was to me when I was their age. What Rakim was to Jay-Z."

And if that doesn't pan out, F.A.B.'s found alternate ways of merchandising himself, including a skateboard wheel fashioned after his trademark yellow bus and, maybe, a men's clothing line. "We just trying to open up opportunities to save ourselves after music," he says. "You know, rapping is the easy part." *Rachel Swan*



the hip hop front, there's the much-talked-about reunion of the **WU-TANG CLAN**, the crown jewel of Steve Rifkind's Loud Records throughout the '90s. "The Wu is starting to get a new audience—college kids who were 5 or 6 years old when *Enter The Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers* came out," says Rifkind, who has signed the Wu to his current imprint, SRC/Universal. Finally, there's 39-year-old MC and former music executive **HEAVY D**, who hasn't dropped an ▶▶▶

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NEXT

Chrisette Michele

THIS GIRL SAYS SHE'S ADULT —
AND SHE'S CONTEMPORARY

Photographed by Barron Claiborne
on February 15, 2007, in New York

Chrisette Michele, 24, wants to think of a song, some snippet from her life that might make her sound tough. "As I do more interviews, I'm realizing that I'm the biggest cornball," she says, snuggled under a blanket on the bottom bunk of her 13-year-old brother's bed in their Patchogue, N.Y., home. "Growing up, we'd decorate the neighborhood with Christmas lights and bake cookies," the former Girl Scout recalls, unable to come up with anything more sinister. "Now when I'm home, I'm up out of this bed cleaning church lights, going to schools, talking to young girls. Oh my goodness, that's why I'm alive."

Of course, Michele also lives to make music. Raised by a deacon father and gospel choir director mother, Chrisette Michele Payne — a former member of her high school student government, choir, step team, pep squad, and African-American Club — says she's "the biggest nerd." But Michele had better get used to being cool; her church-bred vocals now

grace two of the hottest hooks in hip hop, Jay-Z's "Lost One" and Nas' "Can't Forget About You."

As a performance major at Long Island's Five Towns College, Michele started putting her bluesy, Billie Holiday-esque vocals to the test at open mics throughout New York City. Spotted by India.Arie one night, she soon began opening for soul stars Angie Stone and Keri, as well as Arie. "My whole thing was, *I hope they don't think I'm limited to being a neo-soul artist*," she says. "I love Celine Dion. I love Whitney Houston. I love adult contemporary pop music."

And that influence, along with jazz and gospel, is apparent on Michele's Def Jam Recordings as-yet untitled debut, which Michele wrote in its entirety. "I met a lot of bitter people who said, 'You're not gonna make it, you're too fat, your hair's not right,'" Michele says. "Whatever! I thank God my parents taught me who I was."

Laura Checkoway

album since 1999's *Heavy* (Uptown/Universal). The 20-year rap veteran has hammered out tracks featuring producers Tim & Bob and Raphael Saadiq for an album set to be distributed by Universal later this year. For the *Overweight Lover* MC, the wave of activity from veteran acts is no surprise. "I've made an album for people in their late 20s all the way up to 50," he says. "That demographic needs to be spoken to."

Keith Murphy

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WHEN BEN DETRICK CHILLED WITH HARD-BOILED RAP DON'S **BONE THUGS-N-HARMONY** ("LIVE ANOTHER DAY," PAGE 88), THE FORMER OUIJA BOARD PRACTITIONERS EXTOLLED THE VIRTUES OF FAIRY-TALE-TURNED-BLOCKBUSTER-FAMILY-FILM *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE*. SPOOKY.VIBE CONTRIBUTING FEATURES EDITOR ROBERT MORALES TOOK ON THE TYPICALLY CANTANKEROUS **AMY WINEHOUSE** ("GENIE IN A BOTTLE," PAGE 98). "I WAS IN A BAD MOOD, AND SHE WAS WORKING OFF A HANGOVER," HE SAYS WITH A LAUGH. "SHE WAS TRYING TO FORCE ME TO EAT SOME OF HER SPINACH!" ON SHOOT WITH NEW YORK CITY CONGRESSMAN **CHARLES RANGEL** ("THE INSIDE MAN," PAGE 100), PHOTO EDITOR ROBYN FOREST WAS TAKEN ABACK BY HIS EXPANSIVE PHOTO COLLECTION, WHICH CAPTURED YOUNG RANGEL AS A TOO-COOL JAZZ-AGE HEPCAT. *CHICAGO SUN-TIMES* REPORTER ABDON PALLASCH HAS BEEN COVERING THE TRIALS OF **R. KELLY** ("UNFINISHED BUSINESS," PAGE 76) FOR ALMOST FIVE YEARS. BUT THE BEAT ISN'T AS BIZARRE AS YOU'D THINK — ON ONE OCCASION, UNABLE TO FIND A BABYSITTER, HE EVEN HAD TO BRING A COUPLE OF HIS KIDS TO THE COURTHOUSE: "I TOLD MY WIFE, IT'S NOT LIKE THEY'RE PLAYING THE VIDEOTAPE EVERY TIME. THEY JUST ARGUE LEGAL MOTIONS. THE ONLY DANGER IS THEY'LL BE BORED TO TEARS." AND FINALLY, IN-DEMAND LENS MAN **JOE TORENO** WITNESSED "**PRETTY BOY**" **FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.** ("BEATS BY THE POUND," PAGE 96) GIVE A LESSON IN TRASH TALK ON HIS LAS VEGAS HOMETURF. "ACCORDING TO FLOYD, OSCAR DE LA HOYA IS A 'FAKE MEXICAN,'" TORENO SAYS OF THE WIDELY ACCLAIMED "GOLDEN BOY." OUCH! VIBE SAYS, LET'S DO THIS!



PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOE TORENO

V
BACKSTORY
ON THE
BIG STORIES

VIBE.COM 75

UNFINI BUSINI

Five years after **R.Kelly's indictment on child-pornography charges**, there have been plenty of allegations, denials, hearings, motions, and countermotions, but no sign of justice. As Kelly's wife and brother turn against him, and as his fifth year without a trial comes to a close, R.Kelly keeps dropping hits, collecting awards, touring the world, and stepping in the name of love like it's all good. **VIBE investigates**

By Abdon M. Pallasch



SHED ISS



EYES WIDE SHUT:
R. Kelly is reap his rights by Don
Everitt of the Chicago Police
Department, June 7, 2002

VIBE.COM

t's February 21, 2007. Bitter cold in Chicago.

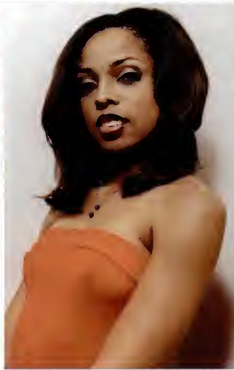
A champagne-colored GMC SUV pulls up outside the newly remodeled Cook County Criminal Courts Building on the city's Southwest Side. The door opens. Out steps R. Kelly, the notorious hometown hero. His four multi-platinum albums and three Grammy awards make him one of the most famous entertainers in the world. But his entanglements with young women — beginning with his scandalous marriage to the late R&B ingénue Aaliyah, who was then just 15 — have given the married father of three a reputation as a dangerous R&B lothario. The State of Illinois prefers another term: child pornographer.

Kelly's dressed crisply and neatly: conventional black suit, white shirt, shiny black silk tie, his hair perfectly braided. There to greet him as he makes his way to the umpteenth hearing in his endlessly delayed child-pornography trial is...no one. Three of Kelly's private bodyguards, also wearing dark suits, flank him as he makes his way into the building that has now become a familiar stop.

Back when he first started coming here for regular court appearances to answer child-pornography charges during the summer of 2002, crowds of fans would gather, waiting in front to shout, "We love you, R. Kelly." Yes, there were a few detractors (or "haters," if you prefer), but they were outnumbered by women swooning and shrieking his name, crowding in, just trying to touch him. Many loudly proclaimed his innocence. At one point, a school bus dropped off a group of young children who stood on the courthouse steps and serenaded him with renditions of his 1996 movie theme "I Believe I Can Fly" and his 2002 confessional "Heaven I Need A Hug."

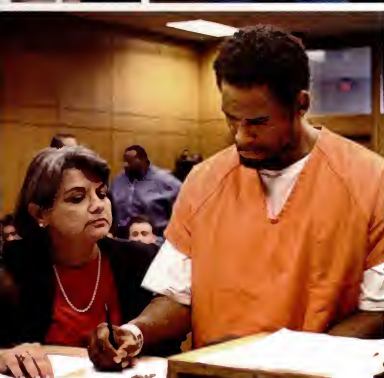
Kellys has been needing that hug since June 5, 2002, the day he was indicted in connection with a 26-minute videotape in which he appears to be having sex with an underage girl. Bootleg copies of the tape (titled *Rated R. Kelly Triple XXX, Vol. 1*) have been big sellers on certain Web sites and street corners, but even after years of widespread circulation, the images remain as disturbing as ever. A young girl in a white shirt sits in a wood-paneled room with a hot tub, taking orders from a voice off camera. A man who appears to be a dead ringer for R. Kelly hands her some cash. She thanks him, then begins to perform fellatio as saccharine ballads by the Spice Girls and Backstreet Boys play in the background. In the next scene she stands there naked, gyrating her hips as the man moans appreciatively. Next she's straddling him and thrusting, then more fellatio. Then, he urinates and masturbates on her face, letting the fluids run down her body, pausing every so often to tenderly wipe her skin with a black towel. The girl lays still and moans quietly, her expression blank throughout. After the man finishes with her, she stands up and walks away from the camera's gaze, leaving the money by the hot tub.

At various moments in the videotape, the man who strongly resembles R. Kelly appears on-screen, adjusting the camera to get the best angle — like he's done this before. He calls the girl by her first name and prefers that she call him "Daddy." The room, with its log-cabin walls, looks a lot like the "Colorado Room" in a mansion Kelly once owned on Chicago's North Side. The mansion's new owners told MTV News that they discovered that the room had video cameras and a keypad entry system.





YOU REMIND ME: (Counterclockwise, from left) Kelly arrives at court, August 7, 2002. A still shot from one of the alleged Kelly sex tapes. Kelly's June 2002 mugshot. Former Kelly protégée Stephanie "Sparkle" Edwards, whose niece is the alleged victim in the Kelly child-pornography case. Kelly signs his bond papers at the Polk County Courthouse in Bartow, Fla., June 6, 2002. Kelly's estranged wife, Andrea, at a party in February 2007.



In the liner notes to Kelly's 2000 album *TP-2.com (Jive)* he refers to a particular girl as his goddaughter. She is the niece of R&B singer and R.Kelly collaborator Stephanie "Sparkle" Edwards. Sparkle cried the first time she watched the tape, saying that she didn't want to believe it was true, but knew that it was. She has not granted any interviews in the last few years, but her niece has testified before a grand jury that she isn't the girl in the video tape. Kelly's lawyers use a broader denial: "There is no tape of Robert Kelly having sex with an underage girl."

Kelly's sexual escapades had been the subject of an ongoing police investigation for several years amid reports of him hanging out around his old school in Kenwood, telling teenage girls he could make them a star and coaxing them into sexual relationships. And sometimes, he could. But Kelly has been sued at least four times by women who claimed some sort of sexual misconduct on his part. He settled all those cases out of court for undisclosed amounts. He's allegedly settled other threatened cases before they were even filed.

What tripped him up was that videotape. Leaked to the *Chicago Sun-Times* in February 2002 by persons unknown, the tape—whether real or, as the defense maintains, fabricated—derailed what might have been the greatest year in R. Kelly's remarkable music career. He was about to release *The Best of Both Worlds* (Def Jam/Jive), his highly anticipated collaboration with Jay-Z, and stood to earn millions from album sales and a tour. Instead, the whole thing became an embarrassment. Since that time, two other similar videos have surfaced, and police also allegedly seized 12 digital images from a camera in Kelly's Florida house that depict, among other things, the singer engaging in sex acts with a young female. Yet none of these damning discoveries has prevented Kelly from doing what he does best—writing, producing, recording, and performing.

But there's no supportive singing from schoolchildren on the courthouse steps today. And there hasn't been any for quite some time. Only a couple of passersby take note of the troubled soul man as he ascends the marble steps and passes through a door where Sheriff's deputies allow him—for "security purposes"—to bypass the lines of less neatly dressed defendants taking their belts off to go through the metal detector. He doesn't mind mingling with ordinary folks from his hometown, but this is one occasion on which R. Kelly is more than happy to go unnoticed.

This summer will mark five years since Robert Sylvester Kelly was first arrested on 21 counts of child pornography. He was relaxed and smiling on June 5, 2002, as he was led away from his rented Davenport, Fla. house in handcuffs while a group of fans chanted, "We love you." Kelly soon released a statement professing his "complete faith in our system of justice." He assured his fans that "when all the facts come out people will see that I'm no criminal."

But Cook County State's Attorney Richard A. Devine begged to differ. "These indictments hopefully will send a message to sexual predators," Devine said at the time, "that taking advantage of minors will not be tolerated, and that there are severe penalties."

After posting \$750,000 bond in a Florida courtroom, Kelly

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: RODOLFO MICHELI/PHOTOWIRE.COM; JOE BUONICCONTI/REUTERS/PHOTOWIRE.COM; OLIVER LACER/RETNA/GETTY IMAGES; SPENCER GREEN

stood before the world in a bright orange prison jumpsuit, near tears. Chicago prosecutors indicted him on 21 counts of producing, and soliciting a minor to participate in, child pornography. They chose that route instead of pursuing statutory rape charges

CAN'T STOP THE MUSIC

He's got a new album scheduled for this month, but even without one, R. Kelly has stayed busy.

Call him audacious, call him stubborn, call him prolific — R. Kelly is never really gone. Even during what seem like his off months, Kelly is a force. Now preparing his seventh solo album, *Double Up* (Jive), for release this month, he's remained a fixture on radio and on video, even as child-pornography charges loom over him. Yet for a man living under a gray cloud, Kelly's music sounds as composed as ever, as relaxed and confident as if he were facing an appointment with a masseuse, not a possible date with a correctional facility. It's as if he's transcended into total artistic self-absorption, where nothing exists but his own work.

In the past few months, he's made three guest appearances, recorded one soundtrack single, produced one remix, and made three references to his Phantom. Not everything he records is so self-indulgent, though. Kelly's longstanding impulse toward absolutism is evident on "Don't Let Go." It's one of his most optimistic songs in years — placed, perhaps dubiously, on the soundtrack to Tyler Perry's latest film, *Daddy's Little Girls*. More typical of Kelly's cheerfulness is Young Jeezy's "Go Getta," where he plays booster to Jeezy's thug-life coach. Perhaps with Jeezy's previous uplift anthem "Soul Survivor" on his mind, Kelly sings the hook — "We trap all day, play all night! This is the life of a go getta" — in a ready melody that owes a debt to Akon, who made "Survivor" indelible.

Still, sexual gamesmanship is never far away for Kelly. On Snoo Dogg's "That's That Shit," he reminds us where he comes from: "If you're looking for some good sex / If you're ever in the 312 / Holla at

because child porn was supposed to be easier to prove. Also, the pornography charges have fewer statute-of-limitations problems and carry the same penalty: 15 years in prison.

Two days later, Kelly arrived at the Cook County courthouse with a small entourage and tried to turn himself in. Police said they had to treat him just like any other suspect, so Officer Dan Everett cuffed Kelly, put him in a police cruiser, and brought him to the Marquette District Police Station to be booked. Everett had been investigating the singer's sexual escapades for the previous three years and has been waiting to testify against him ever since, wondering if he'll ever get the chance.

"R. Kelly outlasted me," says Everett, who recently testified from the Chicago Police Department. "But I don't care how much time it takes. I will come back and testify. There's too much hard work we've done. I'm bewildered. I've been a policeman 30 years and I've never seen this."

Five years later there is still no trial date in sight. A combination of reluctant witnesses, legal maneuvering, and just plain fate have allowed Kelly to continue on with his freedom and his career largely unaffected as the specifics of his alleged crimes slowly fade from public memory. Meanwhile the alleged victim — who witnesses will testify was 14 years old when the videotape was made — celebrated her 22nd birthday in September. At this point, she won't look like a little girl on the witness stand — when and if she ever takes it.

Even by celebrity standards, this marathon pre-trial seems unusually protracted. In the time since Kelly was arrested in 2002, his friend and sometime collaborator Michael Jackson has been charged, tried, and acquitted of child-molestation charges. Martha Stewart has been charged, tried, and convicted of securities fraud and even finished serving her sentence. American Bar Association guidelines recommend that all criminal cases be resolved within a year. "It does seem like a lengthy period," says attorney Thomas Mesereau Jr., who represented Michael Jackson through his trial.

Were the alleged victim prepared to testify against Kelly, the trial might have progressed at a speedier clip. But because she's continuously denied that she's the one in the video, to prove their case, prosecutors will have to parade her friends, friends' parents, teachers, and other acquaintances before a jury to testify that it was indeed her in the videotape. Rounding up almost 200 witnesses took a good deal of police leg work, but it was all done years ago and cannot account for the trial delays since then.

"I can't believe we're still talking about this," says syndicated radio personality Wendy Williams. She says members of "Kelly's camp" flew from Chicago to show her the tape. Her tearful broadcast on the next day is the stuff of legend. "I can't believe that Ron Isley is in jail for tax evasion, and R. Kelly is still free to run loose and out in the streets," she says.

"If this was any other 38-year-old man in any other part of the country," says Xavier Von Erck, director of operations for *Perverted-Justice.com*, an organization devoted to capturing pedophiles online, "he would have been on trial already. Instead we're showing people that if you're a celebrity, we'll treat you differently. The double standard is unfair. And most people aren't [allowed] to leave the state when they're accused of charges like



STUNNIN' SHADES ON: Kelly, Jeezy

a playa." On Bow Wow's "I'm a Flirt," he warns fellas about allowing their girls around him lest he steal them away (which is ironic preparation for the song's eccentric and weird remix, which doesn't feature Bow Wow at all). For his scorching appearance on the remix of Fat Joe's "Make It Rain," Kelly hits the strip joint and deals some hard decks. "I be drillin' these chicks like Major Payne," he quips, before barking, "Don't ask me what my name is / Stupid bitch, I'm famous."

His game is slightly smoother on the remix of "Promise," a tête-à-tête with crunk&B royalty Ciara. Her innocence is offset by his unflinching directness — C: "What you wanna do?" R: "Hit it hard, from the back." Plus, "Promise" offers some possible insight into why the man never takes a coffee break, even when the stakes are high: "Got cash, got cars, got clothes / So lonely when I roll / That's why I did this C and K collabo." Without work, it seems a player's life is one of solitude.

Julianne Shepherd

The delays work to Kelly's advantage. The older the girl looks on the stand, the harder it is for jurors to picture her as a vulnerable, near-helpless 14-year-old. Witnesses' memories fade with every passing year.

PRAY FOR ME: Kelly surrounded by cheering fans as he exits the Cook County Circuit Court, October 26, 2002.



R. Kelly's." Especially not to circle the globe giving concerts as "The Pied Piper of R&B" and singing, "After the show it's the after-party, and after the party it's the hotel lobby..."

State's Attorney Dick Devine, who has been handling the Kelly case since the 2002 indictment, says his office has been ready for trial for a long time. "This is a case that should be tried as soon as possible."

Robert Kelly was born in Chicago on January 8, 1967, the third of four children to a devout Baptist mother, Joann, and an absentee father. He lived for a while in a public housing project in Englewood, then moved

to the less gang-infested but still rough Roseland neighborhood on the Far South Side. Through all the hard times, Kelly retreated to music, where he found solace and hope.

The courthouse where he is to stand trial is just six miles from Kenwood Academy, Kelly's high school, where his music teacher and mentor Lena McLin discovered his amazing vocal talent and coaxed him into developing it. But Kelly never finished Kenwood, and began performing on Chicago's elevated train platforms. An early group he was in won \$100,000 on the Natalie Cole-hosted *Big Break* on FOX, but it soon disbanded. Wayne Williams, who ran the Midwest regional office of Jive Records, heard Kelly singing at a backyard barbecue in 1990 and helped get him signed to the label.

Kelly's career quickly took off, both as a performer with his backing vocal troupe Public Announcement and as a songwriter. It was the latter which brought his first brush with controversy when he secretly married the 15-year-old singer Aaliyah Haughton (see sidebar, page 83) after they'd worked together on her double-platinum 1994 debut, *Age Ain't Nothing But A Number* (Blackground/Jive).

In the decade-plus since, Kelly has become the most dominant creative force in R&B, and one of the most significant pop stylists in recent memory.

He's put out four platinum albums (three of which are multi-platinum) and has had an unchallenged run of chart success. No album of original Kelly solo material has failed to crack the top two on the *Billboard* 200 album chart, and he's had eight No. 1 singles on the *Billboard* R&B/hip hop singles chart.

He's also steadily been torn between two poles throughout his career. On the one hand, he's the most salacious singer of our time, an astonishingly blunt songwriter ("I Like The Crotch On You") who, public image be damned, has consistently brought sex to the airwaves like no other. On the other, he can be gloriously penitent. Songs like "The World's Greatest" and "I Wish" are rich and profound, some of the most moving ballads of recent years.

As Kelly has maintained his spot atop the R&B food chain, those who've spent time and energy working against him have floundered. In 2002, two African-American activists led regular demonstrations against Kelly during his early court appearances. But while Kelly's day of reckoning keeps getting postponed, both of these men have seen their careers tumble. Self-styled community activist and protest leader Derrick Mosley was charged, tried, and convicted on charges that he attempted to extort New York Yankees outfielder Gary Sheffield and his wife, singer DeLeon

brother abuses his wife, molested a young relative, and is bisexual. "He's in the closet for real," he said. In another interview with *Drama*, a hip-hop DVD magazine, he said that his brother offered him \$50,000, a record deal, and a house to say he was the man in the video. Carey said he refused. "And I say to America, the criminal justice system: If you let that nigga off, he's going to do it again, trust me. I bet my life on it." Kelly's camp replied that it wasn't the first time Carey had made outrageous allegations about his brother and declined to "dignify" the claims with any further comment.

"Guys like R. Kelly are looking for control," says Von Erck, of *Perverst-Justice.com*. "They want to be able to do things outside of the norm that most adults won't do. They know if they walked up to a 25-year-old woman and asked these things, they'd get slapped in the face."

Kelly's former girlfriend Kim L. Dulaney says, "He has a dis-

Since Kelly was arrested in 2002, Michael Jackson has been charged, tried, and acquitted of child-molestation charges. Martha Stewart has been charged, tried, and convicted of securities fraud and even finished serving her sentence.

connect where he doesn't even feel guilt." In 2003, she wrote a roman à clef, *Star Struck: An American Epidemic* (Unique Expressions), which she calls a "thinly fictionalized account of a true story," and which closely mirrors the Kelly saga. Though she says that she's "still his friend" and wants to support him, she hasn't spoken with Kelly in more than a year. "This is the guy who has given us all these great things. We submit emotionally to Rob.... [But] I hope people don't ruin him by excusing away his actions. I believe that his problem is not the kind of problem that goes away."

Kelly associate Henry Love Vaughn — who says Kelly has always called him "Uncle" — sued Kelly last year, saying that the singer's sidekicks beat him up while Vaughn was watching the NBA All-Star game at Kelly's house. Vaughn says that Kelly got angry when he criticized how one of Kelly's daughters was dancing a bit too adult-like on the pool table. Kelly's spokesman insisted Vaughn's claims were ridiculous, that he got drunk and was thrown out of the party.

Later last year, Carey told New York's WQHT Hot 97 that his

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

A brief history of Robert Sylvester Kelly

1990: Kelly is signed to Jive Records.

1991: R. Kelly and a then 12-year-old Aaliyah Haughton begin work on her debut album. The two were introduced by Aaliyah's uncle, Barry Hankerson, who was also Kelly's manager at the time.

JANUARY 1992: R&B group Public Announcement, with lead singer R.

Kelly, releases *Born Into the '90s* (Jive).

NOVEMBER 1993: Kelly releases his first solo

album, *12 Play* (Jive), which includes the platinum single "Bump N' Grind." The album

goes on to sell 6 million copies.

AUGUST 31, 1994: R. Kelly, 27, marries 15-year-old Aaliyah; the marriage certificate erroneously states her age as 18. The marriage is soon annulled.

1995: Kelly produces Michael Jackson's hit single "You Are Not Alone" (Epic). Robert releases his own *R. Kelly* (Jive), which sells



INDECENT PROPOSAL

R. Kelly's marital history with Aaliyah

By 1991, R. Kelly had been introduced to ingenue Aaliyah Dana Haughton by her uncle Barry Hankerson, Gladys Knight's ex-husband, CEO of Blackground Entertainment, and Kelly's then manager. "I sang for him," Aaliyah told VIBE in 1994, "and he liked my sound." Shortly thereafter, Aaliyah, then 12, and Kelly, 23, began work on her debut album, the presciently titled *Ain't Nothing But a Number* (Blackground/Arise). The album, whose back cover read, "Written and produced by R. Kelly especially for Aaliyah," was released in May 1994, shortly after Aaliyah turned 15, and became a fast success, thanks to the first single, "Back & Forth," which scaled *Billboard*'s Hot 100. The album was eventually certified double platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America.

Throughout their musical partnership, rumors of a romantic relationship between the two persisted, and critics chattered about the adult content that Kelly wrote for his teenage muse. Kelly's former lover Kim L. Dulaney told VIBE she knew of his relationship with the underage singer before the news broke, but thought it was an "accidental" affair.

"The Aaliyah thing I thought was an accident, a fluke, because I knew that [Kelly] respected Barry, so I felt for him to violate that respect and that trust that Barry had [in him] was an accident," she says. "I knew that Aaliyah really looked up to Rob and had a crush on Rob, so I thought he just fell victim to that association and them giving him so much freedom with Aaliyah."

Aaliyah and Kelly were secretly married at the Sheraton Gateway Suites in Rosemont, Ill., on August 31, 1994 (her age was listed as 18 on the marriage certificate). Once it came to light, the illegal marriage was quietly annulled. Her family separated the couple, and Aaliyah allegedly never saw Kelly again. Despite all this, Hankerson and Blackground continued to manage Kelly until 2000. Kelly and Aaliyah went on to record platinum projects separately. In 2001, just as her career appeared to be reaching superstar heights, Aaliyah was killed in a plane crash after leaving the set of a video



WE NEED
A RESOLUTION:
R. Kelly and Aaliyah



shoot in the Bahamas.

Kelly has never spoken publicly about his marriage to Aaliyah. **Sean Fennessey**

Finally, there's Kelly's wife, Andrea, whom he married in 1996 when she was a 22-year-old dancer in his act. Rumors had circulated for years that she was only staying in the marriage until the case was over. She is the mother of R. Kelly's three children — daughters Joann and Jaya, and son Robert Jr. But as the child-pornography case dragged on, Andrea Kelly hired Chicago's top divorce lawyer, Don Schiller, moved out of the house, and got an order of protection against Kelly on September 2, 2005. "Last summer I was slapped for lying to him and we made up," she told the judge. "But I asked for a divorce and he pinned me down and continued to hit me, yelling, 'Don't you leave me. Why are you leaving me?'" The protection order was later dropped, but the two remain separated.

Throughout this whole ordeal, Kelly's music has continued to move big numbers. "There was a spike in his sales as soon as the news started to come out," says Susan Fletcher Mosley, manager of Fletcher's One Stop Records on Chicago's South Side. To date, he has sold more than 37 million albums, and since his indictment, he's released two solo platinum records and appeared on a number of popular singles (see sidebar, "Can't Stop the Music," page 80) "His fan base is very loyal," says Mosley. "When I was a kid you were lucky to know an artist's real name, much less their personal life. All you can really judge an artist for is their music."

According to Chicago native John Monopoly, who manages Kanye West, Shawnna, and Rhymefest, Kelly has been able to



6 million copies.
1996 Kelly marries Andrea Lee, a 22-year-old choreographer and dancer who appeared in his "You Remind Me of Something" video.
DECEMBER 1996 Kelly's spectacularly uplifting "I Believe I Can Fly," featured on the soundtrack for *Space Jam* (Atlantic), hits

No. 2 on *Billboard*'s Hot 100.
DECEMBER 1996 Kelly is sued by the first of four women who claim he lured them into sexual



relationships. Tiffany Hawkins claims she began having sex with Kelly in 1991 at the age of 15. Kelly settles out of court in 1998.

FEBRUARY 25, 1998 Kelly wins three Grammy Awards for "I Believe I Can Fly," Best Male R&B Vocal Performance, Best Rhythm & Blues Song, and Best Song Written Specifically For A Motion Picture or For Television.
APRIL 1998 Kelly is

arrested for disorderly conduct when he refuses a Chicago



FORGIVE, DON'T FORGET

A father wonders if, in forgiving R. Kelly, we must forgive ourselves first

Even setting aside for a moment the reality of the criminal charges against R. Kelly — and yes, I understand that we can't really do that — there's no denying that the singer embodies so much that ails our society. But as we sit in judgment of him, we can't simply pretend that this is a problem that only concerns R. Kelly, or even just the girls, now women, who stand as his accusers. This is our problem — the problem of celebrity worship and surveillance, the problem of our continued silence in the face of many more sexual assaults and rapes in our communities, and, ironically, our inability, or lack of willingness, to recognize the humanity of those whom we fear and hate.

Yes, R. Kelly is someone to fear, as we should fear anyone who might willingly prey on those less powerful than themselves. As the father of two young daughters, I have no problem hating the man who stands accused. But when I consider Kelly's music — not the booty-poppin' corruptions that keep him relevant to a fickle and underage public, but the tracks where he lays bare his contradictions (2000's "I Wish," 2000's "Bad Man," and 2004's "I Surrender" immediately come to mind) — it is clear that this is a man who has long been telling us that his soul was damaged. "Instead of y'all throwin' them stones at me / Somebody pray for me," he pleaded on "I Wish."

Therein lies the thing that puts Kelly in a legacy of tortured and at times demonic geniuses who've swaddled themselves in their art when their personal demons became overwhelming. In so doing, they sought not only redemption, but also forgiveness.

But that's not something that Kelly has ever once openly asked for. Instead, he tauntingly calls himself "The Pied Piper of R&B." Many of us — and possibly Kelly himself — forget, though, that in the childhood parable, the titular protagonist runs off with our children because we failed to "pay the piper."

We all must pay for the unspoken evils that were done to Kelly; he's as frail and damaged as any of us. If Kelly is found guilty of the charges currently before the court, he would surely merit the prison sentence that awaits. I won't forgive him, but I'd hope that he finds his redemption, because it's what his humanity — and ours — deserves.

Mark Anthony Neal

keep a strong bond with the public by maintaining his connection to the streets. "It was some regular 'hood shit," Monopoly says, recalling a 2005 house party on Chicago's West Side where he saw Kelly getting his hair braided. "Kelly was in the kitchen

with all the people, singing, laughing, talking shit. That interaction made me look at him like, 'Damn, this is a real dude.' This guy doesn't have to be on the West Side. People love him because he's authentic."

Despite Kelly's continued popularity as both a performer and one of the most in-demand collaborators in all of pop music (see *sidebars*, page 86), not everybody in the community has supported him. In 2002, protesters picketed outside WGCI-FM, Chicago's leading urban radio station. "There were people on the sidewalk with CDs, stomping on them, and it got all over the news channels," recalls Elroy Smith, the station's program director. "But we are not attorneys, we are not judges, and we are going to continue to give our listeners what they want — and they want R. Kelly."

"We are a very forgiving people, forgiving to a fault," says Wendy Williams, who admits that Kelly is a "core artist" whose music still plays on stations where her show is heard. When loyal fans hear things they don't like, some try to rationalize the truth away. A quick Internet search turns up lots of people questioning the girls' motives for spending time with Kelly or theorizing that he may have been set up. "You gotta separate the man from the music, which in the beginning I did not know how to do. The music is great, but the man is disgusting and he needs to be in jail," says Williams.

Kelly also remains a popular target for comedians like Chris Rock, who joked during the 2003 MTV Music Awards that Kelly should not be seated near the Olsen twins. In 2004's *Barbershop 2: Back in Business* (MGM), Cedric The Entertainer lampooned the notion Kelly was "set up," saying, "He set up the camera. That's what he did." On his TV show, Dave Chappelle starred in a mock music video for a song called "Pee On U" set to the tune of Kelly's "Ignition (Remix)." More recently, an entire episode of Aaron McGruder's Cartoon Network series *The Boondocks* was dedicated to the Kelly drama, pitting black intellectuals and activists against Kelly fans in a street brawl.

With all that said, the hold-ups in Kelly's trial can seem inexplicable to outside observers. But both the prosecution and the defense insist that the delay has nothing to do with politics or closed-door deals. Instead, the two sides say they have steadily been

police officer's request to turn down his car stereo. Charges were later dropped.

DECEMBER 1996: R. Kelly and Celine Dion's "I'm Your Angel" (Epic/Jive) duet debuts at No. 1 on *Billboard's* Hot 100.

NOVEMBER 2000: Kelly's fifth solo album, *TP-2.com* (Jive), debuts at No. 1 on *The Billboard* 200.

FEBRUARY 2001: The first of

two sex tapes is anonymously sent to the *Chicago Sun-Times*. The man, who bears a resemblance to Kelly, is engaged in sexual acts with a female who appears to be underage.

APRIL 2001: Tracy Sampson, an aspiring rapper, files a lawsuit against Kelly claiming she began having sex with him when she was



17. Kelly will again settle out of court.

FEBRUARY 2002: The *Sun-Times* receives a second sex tape. Kelly will later be arrested after investigators claim it depicts him engaged in a various sex acts with a 14-year-old female.

FEBRUARY 8, 2002: Kelly, *Weekend Update* co-anchor and *at the Winter Olympics* on Gail

DECEMBER 1996: Kelly's *Both Worlds* (Def Jam/Jive), a joint album with Jay-Z, is released.

APRIL 2002: On an appearance on a Los Angeles radio show, singer Sparkle, Kelly's former protégée, claims that the girl in the second sex tape is her niece.

JUNE 5, 2002: Kelly is



BACK AND FORTH:
Kelly in repose.

He's the most salacious singer of our time, an astonishingly blunt songwriter ("I Like The Crotch On You") who has consistently brought sex to the airwaves. On the other hand, songs like "I Wish" are rich and profound.

music video show playing "Let's Have a Party" by the Backstreet Boys and "Too Much" by the Spice Girls. Those were hits in late 1998/early 1999, when the victim was 14. An advertisement can be heard for loan outfit The Money Store, which closed its doors in 2000. If prosecutors use that recording to date the tape, Kelly's lawyers could argue it was just a video recording of that show, replaying years

arguing motions and countermotions, inching a little bit closer to trial all the time.

For much of the first three years, the proceedings in Courtroom 500 before Judge Vincent Gaughan, a no-nonsense Vietnam vet, were arguments about what year the alleged crime took place. According to the indictment, the tape was made sometime between November 1997, when the girl was 13, and February 2002, when she was 17. Kelly's attorneys argued that this span was too big a window to defend. Prosecutors then shrunk the window to the 33 months between January 1998 to November 1, 2000. In the background of the tape, you can hear audio from a

later when the girl was of age. Additionally, the state dropped seven of the 21 counts after realizing they dealt with a specific law passed after the alleged encounter on the videotape. Ultimately, the number of counts matters little. If he is found guilty of even one, the potential jail time is the same.

When they have not been arguing about years, the lawyers and prosecutors have been arguing about experts. Each side has hired experts from around the country to argue whether the video was doctored and whether the girl was actually underage. Each side gets to object to the other side's experts and to demand to see their credentials.

MISSED: DAVID COUNTY JAIL/GETTY IMAGES/NEWS.COM; KELLY W/ JAY-Z, JOHN MCGRAW/REXNA; KELLY IN CAR: LONDON FEATURES INTERNATIONAL LTD



arrested in Davenport, Fla., and indicted on 21 counts of child pornography, based on the second tape.

JULY 2002: Kelly releases the single "Heaven I Need a Hug" (Jive).

JANUARY 22, 2003: Kelly is arrested again on 12 counts of child pornography in Miami. During a search of his Florida home back in June, police allegedly found 12 nude digital photos of what they claimed was an underage female. The charges were later dropped.

FEBRUARY 10, 2003:

Chocolate Factory (Jive) is released and, despite Kelly's child-

porn controversy, debuts at No. 1 on The Billboard 200.

DECEMBER 2003: R. Kelly's

ex-girlfriend Kim L. Dulany publishes *Star Struck: An American Epidemic* (Unique

Expressions), a "fictional" work that she acknowledges bears many similarities to her relationship with Kelly.

AUGUST 24, 2004: Kelly releases his second double album, *Happy People/U Saved Me* (Jive), which goes on to sell 3 million copies.

SEPTEMBER 2004: Kelly and Jay-Z kick off *The Best of Both Worlds* tour.



12 PLAY: WHAT'S R&B WITHOUT THE "R."?

R. Kelly's not just in front of the camera — he's always behind the boards. Here are 12 songs you probably didn't know came from the R.

Hi-Five: "Quality Time" from 1982's *Keep It Goin' On* (Jive) One of R. Kelly's earliest compositions, this is full-bore classic R&B: Men pleading, harmonies soaring, cheeky production effects swirling.

The Winans: "That Extra Mile" from 1993's *All Out* (Qwest) A quaint gospel number from young Robert, featuring a grand piano intro and quirky dance-jazz production.

Aaliyah: "Back & Forth" from 1994's *Age Ain't Nothing But a Number* (Blackground/Jive) Just the sort of up-tempo number the youthful Aaliyah needed to hide her unpolished vocal tics. Kelly flexes his skill as an expert hook-writer.

Changing Faces: "Stroke You

Up" from 1994's *Changing Faces* (Big Beat) An early entry on Kelly's long and impressive résumé of explicit sex songs. Some use metaphor as a way of obscuring meaning — Kelly swings it like a sledgehammer.

Michael Jackson: "You Are Not Alone" from 1995's *HIStory — Past, Present and Future Book 1* (Epic) One of the sappiest, but canniest, songs MJ ever recorded. When you consider Kelly's recent troubles, and Jackson's past ones, Kelly might have been speaking directly to the King of Pop.

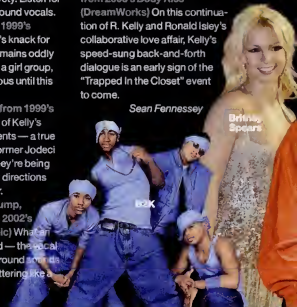
Toni Braxton: "I Don't Want To" from 1996's *Secrets* (LaFace) Dramatic and a bit drippy, Braxton's contralto bobs and weaves around the quasi-new-age strings Kelly throws at her. A fine

example of a singer resisting production. **Luther Vandross:** "When You Call On Me (Baby That's When I Come Runnin')" from 1997's *One Night With You: The Best of Love, Volume 2* (Epic) It doesn't take much to make Luther sound good, but this low-key ballad is unobtrusive and velvety. Listen for Kelly singing background vocals. **Blaque:** "808" from 1999's *Blaque* (Sony) Kelly's knack for writing for women remains oddly overlooked. Blaque, a girl group, was largely anonymous until this scorcher.

K-Ci & JoJo: "Life" from 1999's *It's Real* (MCA) One of Kelly's finest accomplishments — a true blues number. The former Jodeci members sing like they're being pulled in six different directions over a winding guitar. **B2K ft. P. Diddy:** "Bump, Bump, Bump" from 2002's *Pandemonium!* (Epic) What an odd, inventive record — the vocal melody in the background sounds like Kelly himself muttering like a muppet.

Britney Spears: "Outrageous" from 2003's *In the Zone* (Jive) Kelly may have found a willing compatriot in self-indulgence here: Spears, then 21, sings about her underwear and "sex drive." The vaguely Indian flutes are pure Kellys. **The Isley Brothers:** "Busted" from 2003's *Body Kiss* (DreamWorks) On this continuation of R. Kelly and Ronald Isley's collaborative love affair, Kelly's speed-sung back-and-forth dialogue is an early sign of the "Trapped in the Closet" event to come.

Sean Fennessey



Meanwhile, in Florida, police and prosecutors were growing tired of waiting for the trial in Chicago to start. They charged Kelly with 12 counts of child pornography for the images on a digital camera that they discovered in his Davenport home when he was first arrested. These images allegedly showed Kelly and the same girl from the 26-minute video in similarly compromising situations. But two weeks after the seven counts were dropped in Chicago, a judge ruled that Florida police had no right to confiscate Kelly's camera and threw out the case against him there. Kelly's publicists issued press releases touting both victories.

Heading Kelly's legal team is attorney Ed Genson, one of the

top criminal defense lawyers in Chicago, known for his high-powered clients, including many prominent members of Chicago's political establishment. At any time in the last four-plus years, Genson could have invoked state "speedy trial" rules requiring prosecutors to begin their case within four months or drop it. He has not.

Over on the prosecutors' side sits Shauna Boliker, who sports long blond hair, a sunny disposition, and a track record of winning convictions. Boliker heads the historically overworked 15-attorney Cook County State's Attorney's Sex Crimes Unit. She and her colleagues are preparing to try Daniel McCormack,



OCTOBER 2004: Amid rumors of unprofessionalism and jealousy, and after a member of Jay-Z's entourage allegedly sprayed Kelly with pepper spray, Kelly is bounced from the tour.

OCTOBER 26, 2004: *Unfinished Business* (Jive), rumored to be a compilation of old tracks from the sessions of Kelly and Jay-

Z's previous album, is released.

NOVEMBER 2004: Former activist Derrick Mostley claims to have a sex tape featuring Kelly with gospel singer DeLeon Richards, wife of baseball player Gary Sheffield. Mostley is later convicted of trying to extort Richards for money in exchange for destroying the tape.

NOVEMBER 2004: Kelly files

a \$75 million lawsuit against Jay-Z and the tour promoter. Jay files a countersuit, which is dismissed. Kelly's claim is still pending.

SEPTEMBER 2005: R. Kelly's wife, Andrea Kelly, appears in a Chicago court and



accuses her husband of hitting her. She obtains an order of protection against him, which she later drops.

NOVEMBER 2005: Kelly releases his epic mini-opera *Trapped in the Closet Chapters 1-12* (Jive). The DVD will sell 2 million copies.

2006: Kelly's brother Carey Kelly tells a DVD magazine that Kelly offered him \$50,000, a house,

and a record deal to take the child-pornography charges for him.

JUNE 2006: Judge Vincent Gaughan rules that the press and the public will be able to view the sex tape.

OCTOBER 4, 2006: Henry "Love" Vaughn files a suit against Kelly claiming the singer and some of his associates attacked him. As of press time the suit is still pending.

12 PLAY: WE BELONG TOGETHER

Even when only holding down half a record, R. Kelly leaves a mark. Here are a dozen of his essential collaborations

R. Kelly feat. Ronald and Ernie Isley: "Down Low (Nobody Has To Know)" from 1995's *R. Kelly (Jive)* Kelly's never harmonized better than he does on this

socio-operatic duet with Mr. Biggs. This is epic, even for Kelly. Mary J. Blige feat. R. Kelly: "It's On" from 1997's *Share My World* (MCA) A pristine exercise in dream-like soul for the two most iconic artists in contemporary R&B. This is the last time they worked together.

The Notorious B.I.G. feat. R. Kelly: "#1@ You Tonight" from 1997's *Life After Death* (Bad Boy) Both men met their match in lewd pillow talk here. No subtlety whatsoever. Celine Dion & R. Kelly: "I'm Your Angel" from 1998's *These Are Special Times* (Epic) and R. (Jive) This is Kelly's pinnacle of high-class schmaltz. Dion gives Kells a little soccer-mom cred, and R. supplies the Canadian

songbird with some burnished sexuality. Sparkle feat. R. Kelly: "Be Careful" from 1998's *Sparkle* (Interscope) Former protégée Sparkle scored only one hit with Kelly, this simmering warning cut. The moody song would become a fitting emblem of their troubled tale.

Fat Joe feat. R. Kelly: "We Thuggin'" from 2001's *Jealous Ones Still Envy* (Atlantic) A pitch-perfect example of how R. can make anyone sexy. Fat Joe was a NYC classicist before this song. Afterward, he was rocking a blue mink.

Jay-Z & R. Kelly: "Take You Home With Me a.k.a. Body" from 2002's *The Best of Both Worlds* (Def Jam/Jive)

From the wreckage that was their *Best of Both Worlds* project, Jay and Kells delivered one gem, this percolating club track about (what else?) freakin' that thang. Nivea feat. R. Kelly: "Laundromat" from 2001's *Nivea* (Jive) Another in a long line of young females Kelly has err, raised up...with his vocal talent. Nivea

never sounded fresher or sharper. Ginuwine feat. R. Kelly, Baby, & Clipse: "Hell Yeah (Remix)" from 2003's *The Senior* (Sony) On this precursor to his surging remix work, R. commanders the track, swooping in to take you to IHOP, where the cheese 'n' grits flow like wine.

R. Kelly feat. Jay-Z and Boo&Gotti: "Fiesta (Remix)" from 2003's *The R. in R&B Collection Volume 1* (Jive) Never have these two men been more in sync: Jay at the height of his hedonistic period, R. gliding over a smooth salsa guitar.

R. Kelly feat. Big Tigger & Cam'Ron: "Snake (Remix)" from a 2003 single (Jive) On this recent example of the Chicago crooner's fascination with rap-singing, Kells out-weirds even Cam'Ron. Splendidly off-the-cuff.

Cassidy feat. R. Kelly: "Hotel" from 2004's *Spill Personalities* (J) At the time Cassidy was best known as a fierce battle rapper. This flamenco-tinged sex jam introduced him to pop America.

Sean Fennessey



Fat Joe

Celine Dion

a Catholic priest, for allegedly abusing three boys at his parish. They are also pursuing cold cases from decades ago reignited by new DNA tests, and dozens of other crimes that will never make national news but whose victims — unlike the girl in Kelly's case — are willing to take the stand and testify against their alleged attackers.

Of course, the delays work to Kelly's advantage. The older the girl looks on the stand, the harder it is for jurors to picture her as a vulnerable, near-helpless 14-year-old. Witnesses' memories fade with every passing year. And Kelly is not rotting in jail. He is out on bond, making money, and paying his legal bills in full. Both sides could begin plea negotiations at any time, but they haven't. Undoubtedly, Kelly would prefer an acquittal, and as long as he can keep paying his lawyers to put on a well-funded defense, he might feel that he has a good shot at one.

Says Allen Mayer, Kelly's spokesman: "Mr. Kelly believes in the legal process and the fact is that sometimes the process goes very slowly. He remains confident that when all the facts come out in court, it will be clear that he is not guilty of any crime."

Drawing things out has the added benefit of allowing R. Kelly to continue recording and performing. Every time he leaves Cook County, he must check in with a court representative and refrain from contact with any children other than his own.

The delays are beginning to wear on Judge Gaughan. "This is getting a little frustrating — the work isn't getting done," he told the attorneys on June 8, 2006, four years after they began appearing in his courtroom. He implored them to speed up the pace of the proceedings. Some legal experts say he could lean harder on both sides to get this case to trial.

Back in the courtroom, today's hearing lasts not even five minutes, as do most of R. Kelly's hearings these days. Kelly's attorneys say they have one more report from their video expert to get to prosecutors and promise to do so by the next hearing. Most of the discussion between the attorneys happened before the actual hearing, in the judge's chambers, without any court reporter present. Gaughan's invitations to chat over coffee in private seem to violate the spirit if not the letter of Illinois State Statute, which aims to have pre-trial motions aired in public.

Such behind-closed-doors discussions only fuel speculation that Kelly will never go to trial, that some deal has been worked out with prosecutors to string the case along, or that there have been negotiations toward a plea deal. Attorneys for both sides insist that none of those rumors is true. A month after expressing his frustration, Judge Gaughan fell from a ladder at his home and broke several bones, taking him off the bench for several months. Any chance of a Kelly trial was pushed to last fall, and it still hasn't happened.

"It's stressful," Kelly told VIBE in 2004 about his legal battles, "but not to the point where I'm gonna jump off a building, drug it up, drink it away, or smoke it away. With the help of God and the help of family and all of my fans, I can get through."

Additional reporting by Shauna Barbonisa, Laura Checkoway, Risa Dixon, Elayne Fluker, Kevin S. Ford, Keith Murphy, Katie Patterson, Lacey S. Shortway, and Mark Sundstrom



For more on the R. Kelly saga, from music to the courthouse, check out **VIBE.COM**



**A DECADE AGO,
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(one incarcerated, one in the wind),

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ON THEIR
NEW ALBUM.
BEN DETRICK WATCHES
THEM SURVIVE TO**

LIVE ANOTHER DAY

**PHOTOGRAPHED BY
STEPHANIE PFRIENDER STYLANDER
ON FEBRUARY 8, 2007, IN NEW YORK CITY**



AT THE CROSSROADS:
Krayzie Bone, Layzie Bone, and Wish Bone

The leisurely affluence in the lobby of New York's Trump International Hotel and Tower is a world removed from the bedlam that once was the corner of East 99th Street and St. Clair Avenue. Back then, in their treacherous neighborhood on the east side of Cleveland, the teenagers who later became Bone Thugs-N-Harmony stiffened their collars against the cruel Lake Erie wind and hoped for dope fiends to come along.

The crew is better appointed on this frigid February evening, decked in crisp Timberland hoodies and sporting soap-bar-size diamond medallions. Ignoring the expressions of curiosity on the faces of the hotel's mostly blue-blooded clientele, the Thugs, who've seen their share of posh hostilities during their decade-plus career, feel right at home. "This is where I'm supposed to be," jokes Charles "Wish Bone" Scruggs as the elevator glides up from the lobby to his room. "I'm a star."

And like any self-respecting celebrity, he's unimpressed by the accommodations, until a drapery is pulled back to reveal a magnificent view of Central Park and an endless expanse of skeletal, leafless trees. He and the rest of the group — Steven "Layzie Bone" Howse and Anthony "Krazyzie Bone" Henderson — settle in, cracking open Swisher Sweets spines and thumbing through channels on the plasma television. MTV is airing a retrospective of *Yo! MTV Raps*, the groundbreaking show that aired from 1988 to 1995. Clips are shown of Busta Rhymes freestyling in Union Square, MC Hammer auditioning dancers (one of whom is Jennifer Lopez), Ed Lover doing his eponymous, seizure-like dance. "We sat on the couch with Fab 5 Freddy," says Krazyzie testily. "And I bet you they don't say shit about Bone. If they do, it'll be a big shock." As expected, the program makes no mention of the Cleveland boys, and MTV is soon traded in for a

heated series of NBA 2K7 games between Layzie and Wish.

Bone Thugs-N-Harmony have sold approximately 11 million albums, but they're accustomed to such dismissive treatment. Cognoscenti rarely mention the group as belonging in the pantheon of all-time greats. Others have bitten the group's style, they say, without proper credit. For much of the past five years the group didn't even have a major-label deal. But Bone Thugs' new album, *Strength and Loyalty*, and a contract with Swizz Beatz's Full Surface Records are what they've been waiting for — waiting a long, long time.

IN THE EARLY 1990S, FIVE STREETWISE Cleveland kids hopped a Greyhound bus to Los Angeles after speaking on the phone with Eric "Eazy-E" Wright, founding member of N.W.A. and co-owner of the seminal gangster-rap label Ruthless Records. Failing to meet the Jheri-curled mogul in the City of Angels, the group learned he was performing in their hometown and returned in time to successfully sway Eazy with an impromptu backstage audition. Bone became an unexpected phenomenon, thanks to an innovative blend of high-speed rapping, reticulating melodies, and harsh subject matter that fused into a beautiful and haunting nihilism that was still mellifluous enough to ascend the pop charts. Thanks to breakthrough songs like "Tha Crossroads" and "1st of Tha Month" (both from 1995's quadruple-platinum *E. 1999 Eternal*), they became stars. The Thugs took home a Grammy Award for best group in 1996. They collaborated with both the Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur.

Then it began to fall apart. "We got a ride in Sandusky, Ohio, called 'The Demon Drop' [at Cedar Point amusement park], and that's what it felt like," says Layzie, 32. "Take you on the biggest heights you can go on, and then drop you off, and then yank you back up again."

Not all the hard curves were of their own making. In late February 1995, Eazy-E checked into the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, complaining of respiratory problems. By March 26 he was dead due to complications from HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. The

group's 1996 video for "Tha Crossroads" depicted them paying homage to their departed mentor. But Eazy's death marked a decidedly less spiritual crossroads in reality: Ruthless fell under the control of Tomica Woods-Wright, who became Eazy's wife at a bedside ceremony just 12 days before his death, and Eazy's fortune became the center of a flurry of lawsuits. Bone languished. "All you heard about was people fighting for the money and pieces of his estate," Wish, 32, remembers. Aside from disrupting their momentum, they believe the nature of Eazy's death saddled them with the stigma of an illness that remains misunderstood. "The way he died, with AIDS, I think we lose a lot of respect because of that," says Wish. "To me, it should have been totally the opposite way, because people are a lot more conscious of the disease now."

Chafing at their new employer, and lacking Eazy's guidance, the Bone Thugs were adrift. "When you black, young, from the ghetto, and a little bit deprived, when you get something, you gonna act a fool," Wish says. Members of Bone found themselves hurtling back toward the life they believed they'd escaped. "We was cocky; we was toting guns," says Layzie. "We was doing shit asshole-backwards."



NOTORIOUS THUGS: Krazyzie, Bizzy, Flesh, Wish, and Layzie backstage at a September 1997 concert in New York.



Layzie



Krayzie



Wish

The arms race shuddered to an end in September 2000, when Stanley "Flesh-N-Bone" Howse, now 32, was sentenced to 11 years in California state prison for pulling an AK-47 assault rifle from a baby's crib in his Woodland Hills apartment and pointing it at a friend. The lengthy bid ran concurrently with charges that Flesh, a sometime member of the group, accumulated after showing up at a relative's house with a shotgun. "He was made an example of," says Layzie, who sends monthly letters to Pleasant Valley State Prison. "That's my brother, my dog, a nigga I go to war with any day. That shit tore me in half."

Flesh-N-Bone's incarceration was a stumbling block, but his presence on Bone's most popular work was nominal. Bryon "Bizzy Bone" McCane, on the other hand, was arguably the group's most recognizable member. Pale and gaunt beneath an explosion of dark curls, Bizzy possessed an angelic voice and the otherworldly presence that made Bone's flirtations with the occult more convincing than comical. A victim of a torturous upbringing that included abduction, molestation, and foster care, Bizzy exhibited erratic behavior from the moment the ink dried on their Ruthless contracts. "After we got our first check for \$80,000 apiece, Bizzy was gone," says Krayzie, 33. "He was never the same again. People talked Bizzy up—he's going to be the next Michael Jackson, he's going to sell 10 million records, this and that—but [his solo album] came out and it didn't do what people said. I think that was a major blow to his ego."

Last contributing to the group on 2002's *Thug World Order*, Bizzy has continued his erratic behavior since then. He walked out on a 2002 New York concert midway through the group's set and was kicked out of the group. More recently, he made news for rambling on a Houston radio station about roaming penniless throughout Ohio. Bizzy agreed to rejoin Bone for their Full Surface album, but never showed up for the studio sessions.

"Coming from where we came from, it's nothing that should have [kept them] from being a part of what we're doing," Wish says of Bone's two missing members. "They just lost their mind in the middle. There's no excuse for that type of shit. Ain't nobody trying to go back. Not me, not ever."

SWISS BEATZ ISN'T PLANNING TO BOOK the Bone Thugs any return trips to East 99th and St. Clair—unless it's for a video

"COMING FROM WHERE WE CAME FROM, IT'S NOTHING THAT SHOULD HAVE [KEPT BIZZY BONE AND FLESH-N-BONE] FROM BEING A PART OF WHAT WE'RE DOING. THEY JUST LOST THEIR MIND IN THE MIDDLE." —WISH BONE

shoot. "Bone is the best rap group of all time," he says, sounding more like a die-hard fan than an executive pitching his newest product. "Name another rap group that's more versatile, more creative than Bone. Hell, no."

Swizz first became intrigued by the idea of working with the Bone Thugs two years ago, and, after the group independently released *Thug Stories* on Koch in 2006, he inked them to his label last fall. Despite the fact that the group last hit the Billboard Hot 100 with 1997's "If I Could Teach the World," all parties involved are convinced that Bone's double-time deliveries and weaving harmonies will resonate in a world where everyone from R. Kelly to Nelly is sing-rapping, the style's Cleveland heritage all but forgotten. "The industry tried to take our sound and run with it," Layzie says. "There was a lot of bitterness."

Krayzie—who recently took home a Grammy for "Ridin'," his 2006 collaboration with Chamillionaire—became so frustrated that he couldn't bear to watch BET. "Everybody love Bone, but why don't people respect us like they love us?" he asks. "It's a slap in the face."

Confident the group's sound can be updated, Swizz has amassed an army of contributors for *Strength and Loyalty*: Akon, on the lead single, "I Tried"; Mariah Carey, Jermaine Dupri, The Game, will.i.am, and even former Bone rival Twista. Such a pronounced emphasis on guest appearances gives the project a feel both optimistic and uneasy—it's both a celebration of the group's rebirth and an opportunity for their admirers to pay their respects.

But just because Bone Thugs were down, they're not ready to be counted out. Just before walking into the Trump Tower, Layzie had been sprawled in a chunky, label-furnished black SUV. On his cell phone, he was gently chiding one of his children, who was complaining of a stomach ache.

"I heard you don't want to go to school," Layzie said gently. "That's what kids do, go to school." Then he popped the question that Bone Thugs-N-Harmony are finally ready to have people stop asking about them: "What you gonna do, sit around all day?"

Still Tippin'

HOUSTON'S BIGGEST STARS — PAUL WALL, MIKE JONES, CHAMILLIONAIRE, SLIM THUG, AND LIL' FLIP — ARE BACK FOR ANOTHER TASTE OF THE LIMELIGHT

In 2005, the insular rap scene in Houston finally exploded onto the national consciousness. Sparked by Mike Jones, Slim Thug, and Paul Wall's molasses-slow hit "Still Tippin'," the region branded a new generation of major-label superstars in what felt like an instant, bringing with them woozy beats, twang-thick raps, diamond mouthpieces, and gallons of candy paint. Then, just as the scene appeared to recede from view, fellow Texan Chamillionaire's second single, "Ridin,'" began a historic run on the pop charts, keeping the city on the national radar. Now five of the scene's most successful MCs are back with new albums — and they're intent on staying true to their Texas roots, crossover be damned. Will they be able to keep more than their city on lock?

Paul Wall

WHITE HEAT As famous for his ostentatious mouthpieces as for his slow, flashy raps, Paul "Paul Wall" Slayton is Houston's shiniest rapper. Once teamed with Chamillionaire, he made his solo debut in 2005 with *The Peoples Champ* (Swishahouse/Asylum/Atlantic), which debuted at No. 1 on the *Billboard* album chart and spawned the drowsy single "Sittin Sidewayz," featuring Big Pokey.

PAPER CHASE Paul, 27, has been busy with guest appearances alongside artists from

Freeway to Trae. Plus, he still chops-and-screws the occasional album, a holdover from his days as a DJ-apprentice to Swishahouse don Michael Watts. Now he's set to release his follow-up, *Get Money, Stay True* (Swishahouse/Asylum/Atlantic). "A lot of times when artists grow and see some cheese from success, they change up their format or the way they do things," says Paul. "The main thing we trying to do is just stay in our lane." There will be a couple of detours, though, with appearances from Travis Barker (formerly of blink-182).

GET YOUR SHINE-ON With his longtime partner in the grill business, Johnny "TV Johnny" Dang, Wall has launched a Web site, gallbywall.com, as well as a line of diamond-bezel watches. Additionally, he and Dang have partnered with Zenetti wheels for a line of rims. Finally, there's also Expensive Taste, Wall's rough-edged (and still unreleased) side project trio with Barker and Skinhead Rob (of The Transplants). "All three of us are so different, but we have expensive tastes. It's just the lifestyle we lead."



WHO? OH, HIM Of all his Houston compatriots, Jones was easily the most ubiquitous, thanks to his riotous chant "Who? Mike Jones!" and his endless recitation of his now immortal phone number (281-330-8004!). His debut, the hook-heavy *Who is Mike Jones?* (Swishahouse/Warner Bros./Asylum), went double-platinum, thanks to the Salih Williams-produced hits "Still Tippin'" and "Back Then."

LIVING THE DREAM Jones' new album, *The American Dream* (Swishahouse/Warner Bros./Asylum), will be bundled with an orig-

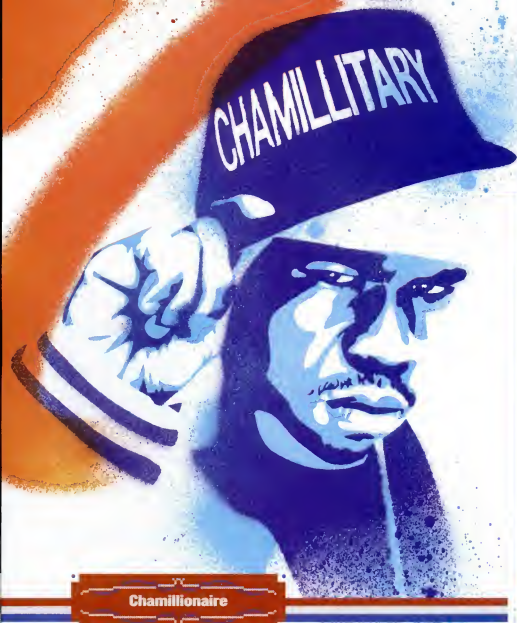
inal movie of the same name. Starring who? Mike Jones. The album will feature more of the same candy-painted Cadillac talk of his debut, but Jones hasn't forgotten his female fans. "My first album was very male-driven," he says. "This time I got something for the ladies" — a fact that plays out on tracks featuring R&B crooners Lil' Mo, LeToya Luckett, and Trey Songz. Ever diplomatic, Jones also says he's not worried about the prospect of a failure to launch for Space City U.S.A. the second time around. "We really not tryin' to steal the light from no other city," Jones says from outside

Houston's Club Ice Age, a venue he promotes every Sunday night. "We just trying to let people know Houston is relevant."

SCREEN TIME Jones, 26, appeared on a few episodes of Fox's *Prison Break* last season and says he's set to show up on the silver screen, too. "The William Morris Agency sent me all types of scripts," he says. "I'm finna start working with Morris Chestnut, Queen Latifah, Eva Mendes, and a whole bunch more people. I just had to get finished with the album. Now I'm finna start being in movies."

"We really not tryin' to steal the light from no other city. We just trying to let people know Houston is relevant."

PROPERTY
OF
MIKE JONES



Chamillionaire

COLOR ME BADASS Though Hakem "Chamillionaire" Seriki was one of Houston's loudest voices before the city's explosion — thanks to 2002's *Get Ya Mind Correct* (Paid In Full), his shared album with Paul Wall, and 2004's legendary three-disc *The Mixtape Messiah* — he was the last to blow up. Last year, "Ridin," featuring Krayzie Bone, from the platinum *The Sound of Revenge* (Universal), became a pop crossover smash, earning him a Grammy this year for Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group.

SECOND-ROUND KO "I'm still getting used to all the fame," Chamillionaire says. "It's still awkward to me how so many people can claim to love you because of a hot song. People who know me will tell you that it's hard for me to trust just anybody. I still have trust issues with my fans and wonder if they are gonna stay as faithful

as they say they will." So, forgoing laurel-cresting, Chamillionaire has upped the ante on *Ultimate Victory*, which he executive-produced and A&R'd on his own. "I'm gonna pretend like I don't have the platinum album and ring-tone plaques on the wall," he says. That means production from the likes of Jonathan "J.R." Rotem and lyrical assistance from the likes of Lil Wayne, Busta Rhymes, Devin the Dude, and even Slick Rick.

NO OVERBITE While everyone from Houston hardrocks to Wisconsin white kids have begun accessorizing their smiles with diamonds, Chamillionaire, 27, has taken out his grill and retired it, hoping instead that his art will shine. "I'm more than just some rapper from Houston and some diamonds in my mouth," he says. "Every day I think about how I can step outside the box. I'm not gonna sit back and kick my feet up."

Lil' Flip

RHYMES GALORE Dubbed "The Freestyle King" by Houston's legendary DJ Screw for his ability to flow for minutes on end, Wesley "Lil' Flip" Weston was the first post-Geto Boys Houston artist to sign a major label deal, after the success of his 2002 independent debut, *The Leprechaun* (Sucka Free), which moved more than 200,000 units. He released two platinum albums with Sony, *Undaground Legend* and *U Gotta Feel Me*, and survived a notable beef with T.I.

OFF LABEL Last year, Flip split from Sony after what he perceived as mismanagement on the part of the label, ultimately signing with Asylum/Warner Bros. He says Sony leaked parts of his album *I Need Mine*, and he was sued for an unlicensed Pac-Man sample on "Game Over (Flip)," one of his

"I'm 'The Briefcase Man' now. I'm handling things for myself."



biggest hits. (The label eventually settled.) "You get with a major label and you get into this imaginary world where you think, *Man I'm gonna sell 300,000 the first week*. But I realized that I still gotta do what I was doing before I got with them."

MAN AT WORK Flip, 26, gets reflective on *I Need Mine*, which includes a song about single-parenting and a eulogy for recently deceased artists such as James Brown and Gerald Levert. "I have no A&R breathing down my neck, trying to tell me what's hot," he says, relieved. "I go in the studio and do me." He's also writing a book about his industry experiences that he hopes will be educational for younger artists. "I'm on some grown-man shit," Flip says. "I even switched my alias — I'm The Briefcase Man now. I'm handling things for myself."




Slim Thug

BOSSING UP Hailing from Houston's Northside, Stayve "Slim Thug" Thomas made a name for himself locally selling tapes featuring an instantly recognizable baritone and laid-back flow. At a concert in 2003, he met Pharrell Williams, who signed Thugga to his Star Trak imprint on Interscope months later. One year later, Slim released the not-quite-platinum *Already Platinum* (Interscope/Geffen/Star Trak). But Slim, 26, says he hasn't let the album's underperformance get him down. "I always try to keep it positive," he says. "I go to church, and in church they always try to remind you to shake 'em off, so I don't really try to let nobody get to me."

HEARD OF THAT? In addition to his forthcoming second Interscope album, the towering 6-foot-6 Slim is also releasing *To Serve and Collect* (Koch/Boss Hogg Outlawz),

an album with his Boss Hogg Outlawz crew. His follow-up, *Boyz of Bosses*, will be a different affair from his debut. "My next album is not really a Pharrell project; it's just me," he says. "A lot of people didn't like me and Pharrell getting together; they say he changed my sound, so I'm just gonna give the people what they want. I'm not listening to the labels or nothing like that; I'm just doing what my team feels comfortable with."

INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN "When I was independent I would be recognized all over Texas," he says of the global fame that's come with the Houston explosion (and his cameo work alongside Beyoncé, Gwen Stefani, and others). "But now when I go to Los Angeles, New York, even Amsterdam, people know who I am. I want to keep this Houston movement rolling. We all need to step out with our A-game." 

AFTER MORE THAN 10 YEARS IN THE RING,
"PRETTY BOY" FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.
SAYS HE'S BEEN SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST

BEATS ★★★ BY THE POUND



"I could go to the club every night and still whoop Oscar. That's how cold my fight game is."

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOE TORENO ON FEBRUARY 13 IN LAS VEGAS

f 30 really fit the new 20, as Jay-Z insists on last year's *Kingdom Come* (Roc-A-Fella), consider Floyd Mayweather Jr.: the young golden boy of boxing. Since turning pro 11 years ago, the former Golden Gloves champ and '96 Olympic bronze medalist — who turned 30 earlier this year — is 37-0 with 24 knockouts and World Boxing Council titles at four weight classes: superfeatherweight, lightweight, superlightweight, and welterweight.

But before "Pretty Boy" Floyd can even think about resting on laurels, he'll need to go through 34-year-old Oscar "Golden Boy" De La Hoya (38-4, 30 KOs), who until recently was trained by Mayweather's estranged father, Floyd Mayweather Sr. The two fighters will knuckle up at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas on May 5 (9 p.m. EST; HBO PPV), with De La Hoya's Junior Middleweight belt on the line. Here, Mayweather breaks down his thoughts on the Golden Boy's chances, his own legacy, and his recent threat to retire at the peak of his career.

VIBE: Why are you putting your undefeated record on the line against Oscar De La Hoya — especially considering he's raking in a reported \$25 million for the fight to your reported \$10 million?

Mayweather: This fight isn't about who's getting the most money. It's about legacy. You've seen Muhammad Ali vs. Joe Frazier. You've seen Marvin Hagler vs. Sugar Ray Leonard. But *this* is the biggest fight in boxing history. It's going to be nothing but blood.

How do you match up with De La Hoya?

Oscar De La Hoya has done great things for boxing. He's won titles in different weight classes, he's a great businessman [with his Golden Boy Promotions], and he's beaten whoever was put in front of him. But I am, hands down, the best fighter *ever*. This fight is going to solidify that.

Have you approached training for this fight any differently from your normal routine?
I ain't do nothing different. I could go to the club every night and still whoop Oscar. That's how cold my fight game is.

Really?

That stuff you see on TV? Just for the camera. I don't really train like that. I've been a champion for almost 10 years and all I did was go to the gym and spar. I parried the whole time.

Everyone's saying you're going to hang up your gloves after this fight.

Who says I can't? At 30? I want to be there for my four beautiful kids. My relationship with my dad is the way it is because all he ever did was give me money and take me to the gym. I'm still going to be involved in boxing through Mayweather Promotions — Oscar and I are going to be rivals in the promotion business.

And all the money in the world couldn't bring you back to the ring?

If I do return, the only person I'm fighting is De La Hoya again. That's the only match I'd consider. But it's all about Cinco De Mayo right now. And I would die for this victory.

Mark Letourneau

AND IN THIS CORNER...

Floyd Mayweather Jr. may think he's the greatest, but celebrated-trainer-turned-HBO-World-Championship-Boxing-commentator Emanuel Steward, who proposed Oscar De La Hoya for two fights in 1987, explains how the reigning Junior Middleweight Champion can retain his belt.

The key to this fight is speed. This is the biggest fight of Mayweather's career. If he can beat De La Hoya, it would enhance his figure in boxing tremendously. So Mayweather has to keep his hand speed

up and be himself. De La Hoya's place in history is already set — he's the biggest attraction in boxing. I'd say about 70 percent of the crowd will be in his favor. De La Hoya needs to use his left jab, the beautiful left jab he hasn't been using recently, to set up other combinations. He has to explode inside and out because if he starts slow, he's going to get eaten up. All logic favors Mayweather because of his speed, but De La Hoya can still win this fight if he's able to apply enough pressure.

As told to M.L.



England's AMY WINEHOUSE might just resurrect vintage soul for the hip hop generation. That is, if the alcohol, the weight issues, and the tabloids don't make her unravel first

By Robert Morales

Amy Winehouse, clear-eyed, takes the tiny stage at New York City's chic, intimate Joe's Pub and, fronting a 10-piece band, plants herself like a flag of conquest. In a short black cocktail dress, with an exaggerated bouffant hairdo, she's a spitfire. It's her U.S. debut on this mid-January night, and though she's a bit nervous, she'll be damned if anyone notices.

Snarky stage patter aside, she performs her set with impeccable phrasing, each syllable of her blunt and jazzy pop ballads a soft jab. She's jaunty and loose, and possessed of a self-mocking insolence that recalls Elvis Costello's early self-destructive punk behavior as much as it does the sweet, doomed wistfulness of '70s R&B diva Cory Daye. Halfway through the set, she asks the bar for an amaretto sour. She requests yet another before coming to her last song, even as she hilariously, and optimistically, assures the audience that an encore is coming. Later that night, she drinks throughout her second set, growing saucier by the hour.

It's easy to worry about Winehouse — the Internet and British tabloids are rife with sto-

ries about her drinking, her public brawls (with fans, her ex-boyfriend, and, verbally at least, with Bono), speculations about her weight loss (she dropped four dress sizes in less than two years), and her mental health.

Yet all that fades into the background when you hear the 23-year-old North London native sing. She's got an arresting voice, and uses it to speak with wry, clinical detachment about relationship screw-ups, her drinking, and her self-proclaimed short temper. It's all over her stateside debut (and her second album) *Back To Black* (Universal Republic), which is sharp and wise and unHINGED all at once.

But confessional art can be as uncomfortable for listeners as it is entrancing, which means that Winehouse is often lauded and castigated for the same things.

TWO NIGHTS AFTER HER JOE'S

Pub show, fighting a hangover, Winehouse wants to shoot pool in a Lower Manhattan bar, but settles in at the dark Lucky Strike restaurant next door. She orders a hot apple cider, then devours a big bowl of steamed mussels. The bouffant is gone — this night it's a simple wild shock of ebony hair. She wears a T-shirt that reveals wiry arms, and they're festooned with girlie tattoos.

"I'm just not good at sitting and talking about myself," Winehouse says — an odd statement for

someone whose work is so searingly intimate. Still, she's a born storyteller: Her parents are working-class Russian Jews; with no special musical training as a child, she

dropped out of school at 15 and started songwriting a year later; she was a secretary for a wire service, writing

ad and news copy, when she got the deal for her first album, 2003's *Frank* (Universal Island [UK]), at 19. "I wasn't going around knocking on doors, like, 'Hey, make me famous!'" she says. "A very good friend of mine was A&R-ing and said, 'I'll give you some studio time, just go in with your guitar.'"

Winehouse didn't really understand at the time that this was her big break.

Genie In



Largely produced by Salaam Remi, the American producer best known for his work with Nas, The Fugees, and Ms. Dynamite, *Frank* was a critical fave in Europe, selling more than a million copies there. Winehouse earned a prestigious Ivor Novello songwriting award for the jazzy hit single "Stronger Than Me." The album was a startling achievement from someone so young — *Frank* sounded more like the triumphant comeback record of a seasoned and burnt-out chanteuse.

Nevertheless, cuts like "In My Bed," "Take the Box," and "Fuck Me Pumps" became club hits, and underscored the fact that Winehouse was very much singing to her own demographic, drizzling her formal soul with a bit of hip-hop swagger. Wearing her jazz influences — Dinah Washington, Sarah Vaughan — as plainly as the tats she'd later sport, Winehouse went well beyond the imitative, Stepford Wife soul of Joss Stone, past pastiche or mannered tribute, into depths of feeling undisturbed since Alanis Morissette and Mary J. Blige were first purging all over the pop charts.

Clearly, the music had an impact. In the two years that passed between *Frank* and the U.K. release of *Back To Black*, Winehouse found herself on the receiving end of a great deal of scrutiny. "When you suddenly drop a lot of weight, people assume you've been doing crack!" she says. "They'd come up to me in my neighborhood and say, 'Hey, me too!'"

"Rehab," the first single from *Back To Black*, is a cheery thumb in the eye to Winehouse's haters and interrogators. A subversively funny anti-sobriety anthem, it swiftly became a U.K. Top 10 hit. The rest of the album — this time co-produced by Remi and New York DJ/scenester/producer Mark Ronson — is lighter in tone than *Frank* and more

deliberately hopeful, highlighting Winehouse's love of exuberant singers like the Shangri-Las, Minnie Riperton, and Aretha Franklin.

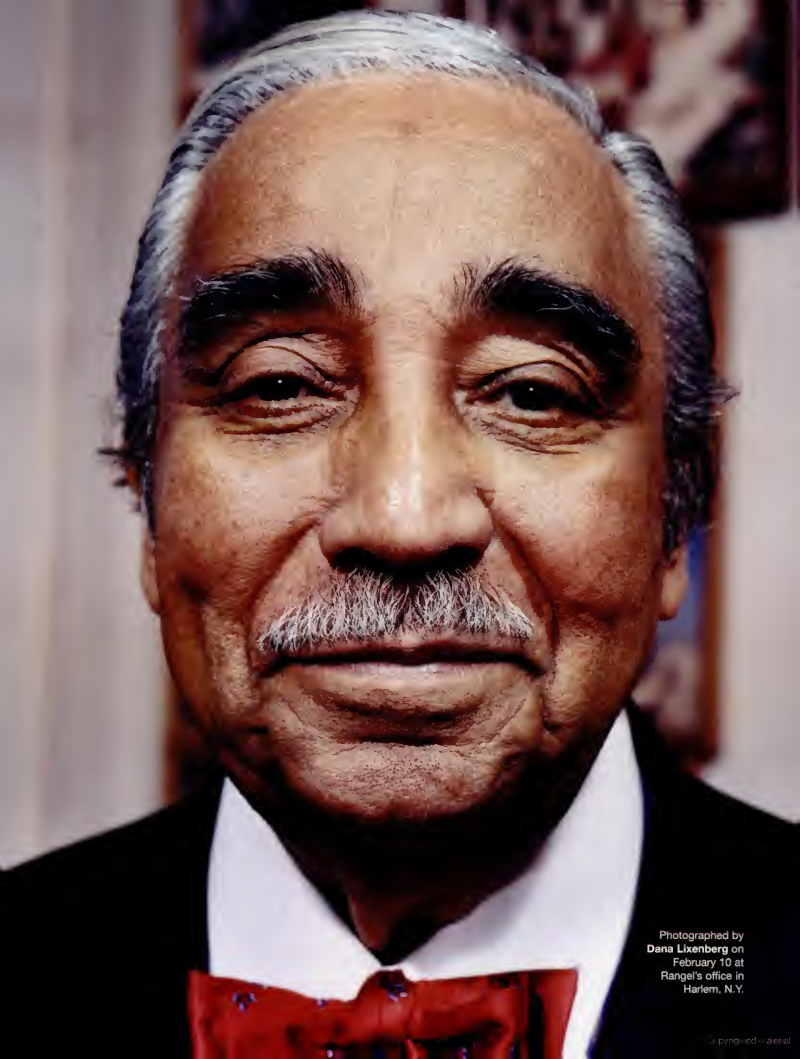
An infectious Motown flavor runs throughout the title track, "You Know I'm No Good," as well as "Me & Mr. Jones" — the three most typical Winehouse songs on the album in terms of their gleefully dire assessment of relationship dynamics (from the title track: "He left no time to regret / Kept his dick wet / With his same old safe bet"). And while "Love Is a Losing Game" and "Wake Up Alone" are ballads almost supple with desolation, "Tears Dry On Their Own" is exultant, fueled by a riff on 1967's joyful Ashford and Simpson-penned, Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell hit "Ain't No Mountain High Enough."

Back To Black, then, marks an advance for Winehouse's career, though really it's her life that's evolving. (She's still a British tabloid fave though — in February, *News of the World* published a picture of her with alleged cocaine residue on her nose.) During dinner, she's mainly rapturous about her musician boyfriend, Alex, with whom she currently lives. And after having sung so often of her previous crummy boyfriends, she rather appreciates the karma of her new beau writing songs about what a bitch she can be. "Like, if I get drunk, go out all night with my friends, and I don't come home, the next day he's up [calling], 'Where are you?'" she says, equal parts appreciative and rueful. She can't deny, though, that when you're slipping, it's nice to have someone there to help you up: "And I'm like, 'Oh baby, I'm coming home. I'm sorry.'"

**Photographed by
Alan Scrymgeour
February 15, 2007
at Blank Space
Studio in London**

A Bottle





Photographed by
Dana Lixenberg on
February 10 at
Rangel's office in
Harlem, N.Y.

The Vibe Q:

CHARLES RANGEL

From Sugar Hill to Capitol Hill, Congressman Charles B. Rangel is definitely running things, but the congressman from Harlem is far from satisfied. After devoting much of his career to fighting for equality and economic empowerment, the decorated Korean War veteran is taking on his biggest fight yet: **bringing back the draft**. He wants Americans from *all* income brackets to share the sacrifices of war. And if that doesn't define his legacy, then maybe calling out his colleagues in the White House will. **By Robert Morales**

Representative Charles Bernard Rangel is the most powerful man in Congress. After 18 terms, the feisty 76-year-old now chairs the House Ways and Means Committee, determining where the money that runs the country comes from and who gets it. Born in Harlem and raised by his mother from the age of 6, the former chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus represents all the people of his hometown to the fullest, even as he looks out for the interests of black people around the world.

In the '80s, he led the effort to close tax loopholes that made it attractive for Fortune 500 companies to do business with South Africa's apartheid regime. In the '90s, he worked to make the U.S. help restore a democratic government in Haiti. He was the principal author of the \$5 billion Federal Empowerment Zone legislation to help rebuild urban America, and he championed tax credits to make it easier for the underprivileged, veterans, and ex-convicts to find housing and jobs. The political Zen master sums up his career of activism and public service in his candid new memoir, *And I Haven't Had a Bad Day Since* (Thomas Dunne Books). But Rangel is not finished fighting. An Army veteran of the Korean War (where he was awarded the Bronze Star and a Purple Heart),

Rangel recently introduced his most controversial piece of legislation yet: a bill to bring back the draft. When we visited him in his cluttered Harlem office, we found out he still doesn't back down from a fight.

What sort of music do you listen to?

Oh boy, I'm a ballads man: Duke Ellington, Johnny Hodges with Duke, of course. I like Cab Calloway. Cannonball. My favorite guy singing is Johnny Hartman. Billie Holiday. Sarah [Vaughan]. I got about 500 CDs. We used to go down to Bop City on 52nd Street, the Royal Roost, the Renaissance Ballroom, too, and the Apollo—we crashed that every time we could. That was my place. I coulda sworn Billie Holiday was singing to me there when I was 14 or 15.

Did you ever meet her?

Matter of fact, when I was a desk clerk at the Hotel Theresa, some guy brought her in there and wanted a room. I couldn't let him take that woman up to a room—she was just washed out on the bellman's bench. He says, 'That's Billie Holiday and I'm her husband and I want to see the manager!' It's about 2 o'clock in the morning. I said, 'Mister, for all practical purposes, I am the manager. And I have no rooms.' You know, it's easier sometimes to love people from afar, never see them. When I saw her, it just broke my heart.

Did you talk to her at all?

No, no. I was going to law school, didn't want to make a bad situation worse. She wouldn't know what I was talking about anyway! But I like all music. I love listening to hip hop, but I find the cursing repugnant to everything I believe in. It's not that I'm that spiritual, but it's just so degrading. 'Nigga this, ho...' and all that stuff. I cannot understand how it's so widely accepted. And I don't want to. But I guess the word has more of a sting with me at 76 years old than it does with younger people. I'm amazed to see how popular it is. I go for the dancing. I was Chairman of the Apollo Theater Foundation, and I used to love watching the contestants do their thing.

Now that the Democrats have taken control of Congress, what do you feel the party's obligation is toward a generation of kids who feel totally disconnected from politics?

I look at it two ways: The kids who are involved are *totally* involved, and the Congressional Black Caucus interns are just the most enthusiastic, exciting young people I've ever seen—and they don't lose the hip hop in order to get involved in politics. It's so totally exciting to see the broad range of things that young people think about.

By the same token, I'm going to try to correct a serious problem that we have in the black community, and that is high school dropouts. Our whole public school system is geared toward going to college—it's not geared toward working and getting a job. And when you fall out of that system, there's no door open for you.

I fell out of that after two years of high school. Fortunately for me, there was a peacetime army and, then, as a result of having been in combat, being wounded, getting preferential treatment on the G.I. Bill, it became a bridge from the street to the halls of Congress. Unfortunately, there's no door open now except the door to Iraq.

I had hearings with economists who showed that 50 percent of our black kids are

dropping out of high school — out of that, the overwhelming number of them eventually get into trouble. I just stress grabbing one of these kids and acting like you care for them. And I don't want to sound like a prude, but the whole idea that marriage is not even thought about bothers me. It's not as though I was raised with a lot of kids with fathers, but there was a sufficient amount of fathers around that they didn't mind.

Kids take it for granted, they have no options.

If you talk to some of these youngsters, they don't think much of themselves. When I tell them about the streets that I knew, their jaws drop and they stare as though having a job means you *couldn't* come from the street. It's heartbreaking. I used to be a prosecutor, and one of the biggest crimes that we have out there is a defense lawyer — normally legal aid — telling a kid, 'Listen, this is a felony, if you go to trial on a felony, this judge will probably give you five to 10 years. On the other hand, I can get it reduced to a misdemeanor and you won't have to do any time because you're a first offender.' Next goddamn time, the same lawyer's gonna tell you, you can't take the stand because they don't want the jury to know that you've had a bust.

Once you get that second bust, it's all over. You're not going to get a goddamn job. And then you fall in love with the institution, the dependency of the institution.

Jail becomes another neighborhood.

Another neighborhood, another family, another lifestyle. And then when you're out of jail, you act like you're in jail anyway. You dress like it, talk like it. ... And it's startling to see the black professional women — they got nobody out there. They can't find anybody, yet they are achieving. I go back to my law school, everywhere, you don't see the men competing anymore.

The white majority — dad's a professional, mom's a professional, the kid's gonna be a professional, period. I knew Italians whose dads were untrained who went to law school — the Irish and whatnot — and I keep in touch with them. Now their kids are trained, and we're falling behind in that, period. And having these immigrants come over with guest-worker-type programs cut out the entry-level jobs. I mean, I've done more *shit* — I worked in hardware stores, I mopped floors, worked at good and bad hotels. But none of that meant a thing to me because I knew it was just a matter of time

before I'd be out of it. So you *need* those jobs, and there's *no* job that no American wants — just give him some pay.

Low-level jobs bring you in touch with reality.

Exactly. Even being a busboy and seeing how someone is mistreating you [*laughs*]. I mean, I'm one of the nicest people in the world in terms of tolerance, 'cause that's how I made my tips. I don't even think if someone insults me today, I'd think they're even talking about me. With all of the arguments I've had publicly with the Republicans, I can't think of one whom I really dislike — maybe Cheney a little bit; he's just an unpleasant son of a gun.

What kind of guy is Bush?

The president is one of the most pleasant, slap-on-the-back, fun people you want to talk with...but you always leave not knowing whether he knows what's going on. I only remember one serious discussion with him — which was scary — and he said, 'I'd like to talk with you after the group leaves.' I wanted to get out with the mics with the press, with everyone else, but you don't tell the president, 'I want to leave.' And he says, 'Charlie, I've been around the country and they're ready for social security reform.' And I said, 'Well, if that's so, Mr. President, the press hasn't been very kind to you,' because there was nothing but negative reactions. But I said, 'If you take private accounts off the table, I think we can get bipartisan support,' and he looked at me, and said, 'I am the President of the United States, and as long as I'm President of the United States, private accounts will be on the table!' And I felt so sorry for him that I said, 'Yes, Mr. President,' and got the hell on out of there.

That's the same tone he gave to the congress just a week ago [at the State of the Union address], that, 'We're sending troops,' that, 'We're going to stay the course.' Someone once asked me whether I was Baptist — and before I could be critical of his question, he said that the only reason he asked was that he knew the president was Baptist, and that sometimes in talking with the president he thinks the president's mind is someplace else and he's not responsive to national security questions. And I said, 'Why would you ask?' and he said, 'Well, you know, in the black community, they relate to Jesus in a different way and I just thought...I'm so sorry,' and he was apologizing but I was more frightened, you know — that he could be an old timer from the Nixon days and talk this candidly about the President of the United



RIGHT ON: (Clockwise from left) Rangel holds up a sign before a Civil Rights march in Selma, Ala., in 1964. (From left) New York State Comptroller H. Carl McCall, Assemblyman Herman 'Denny' Farrell Jr., Rangel, Assemblywoman Geraldine Dennis and Assemblywoman Roger Green (hidden by Cuomo's head) join Gov. Mario Cuomo at a ribbon-cutting ceremony of the Alhambra Ballroom, across the street from the State Office Building in the early '90s. (Not seen) Lionel Hampton shares some words with Rangel in the late '70s.



Charles Rangel has a lot more to say at VIBE.COM

States' either mental or spiritual dependency. *That's scary.* And I know — having followed drug and alcohol dependency — this faith-based stuff works. It takes your dependency off chemicals and transfers it to Jesus! It depends on what works for you, what keeps you from going crazy. The president is a different type of politician than most. I've seen him on television in churches, and he talks about Jesus as his personal savior.

He's not kidding.

No! No, no. He definitely had a drinking problem, and I believe he's straight now, sober.

And Cheney?

I think he has a personality disorder, there's just no question about it. There are some people that have an unpleasant demeanor, and they always have a scowl — I don't know this guy that well. But I can't see him telling a joke unless it's a dirty joke.

Why do you want to reinstate the draft?

I've never been an advocate of the draft, but, when I first saw how everyone was so willing to give the president authority to go into a foreign country when there was absolutely no evidence that it was based on anything except oil and Americans' presence in the Middle East and the protection of Israel, I knew that those who made the decision long before 9/11 to invade and knock off Saddam Hussein, if their kids were going to be placed in danger, that decision would have never been made. I want you to note that the president has never made an appeal for able-bodied Americans to join the military, ever. And the reason for it is they've already decided that it's the working poor who are going to fight the wars. They wouldn't embarrass themselves to suggest to their class to get involved for 20 or 30 thousand dollars and maybe get hurt, maybe get maimed or killed.

And so now I can say publicly, it's hypocritical to support the war, and not want your kids to be involved in it. I'm the patriot, you know — I've got the Purple Heart, I got all that stuff [*gestures at his medals*], and if I thought my country was in danger, I would want to do something.

And so, if it were peacetime, I still would be for a mandatory draft, for people to do peacetime service and not have to be involved with the military.

Do you think this kind of service would have helped us mobilize a better response to Katrina?

No question about it. And we would feel more secure in seeing these young people — not necessarily with weapons — but using



“With all of the arguments I've had publicly with the Republicans, I can't think of one whom I really dislike — maybe Cheney a little bit. He's just an unpleasant son of a gun.”

their eyes and intelligence and having them trained. I am certain that people who see some of the security that's offered to us now don't believe that it's as professional as it should be.

Anyone who has served their country got a good, patriotic spirit out of it. If you couple with that the opportunity to get an education, to wear the uniform, to provide services in our airports, our seaports, our railroad stations, our hospitals, our schools — there's such a need of help in this country, especially when we have the threat of terrorist acts. So separate and apart from the military, I think that we can give to our young people a great experience and an educational benefit to better prepare people for mature, competitive life.

So what are the odds your bill will become law?

There's no question in my mind: My bill's

not going to pass as long as there's war. But I will consistently push it because we don't have kids from the Congress, the Pentagon, the White House, the CEOs — and it's not even considered a question. I mean, we got 3,000 people killed, more than 30,000 maimed or wounded — the question of human life is not even an issue, and I get so concerned with the churches and the synagogues and the temples ignoring this, when as far as I'm concerned, if you're up there in Heaven and Saint Peter's there asking what the hell did you do, and you can't say you done a goddamned thing, you don't deserve it. I mean, if you and I left here and saw a dog being whipped...

You'd do something.

You'd do something! And why not a human being?

Trench coat by **COSTUME**
NATIONAL, hoop earrings and
silver cuff (right arm), all by
GIPAL PROPS, clear bangles by
R. & G. GRAZIANO, layered cuff by
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Frothered jacket, jewelry, and
sunglasses, and belt, all by
DOLCE & GABBANA, earrings
by **ALEXIS BILTAR**, sandals by
BARBARA BUI







Gold metallic dress by MAXMARA
shoes, necklace and earrings by
ALEXIS BITAR

Satin Geometric dress, stripe
lights, and wedge sandals, all by
GIVENCHY; white cuff and silver
brace on right arm, both by
**ISAAC MANEVITZ FOR BEN-
AMUN**; white bracelet on left arm
and cross bangles, all by **P.J.**
GRAZIANO; frosted Lucite bangle
and metal bangle on right arm,
both by **ALEXIS BITTAR**

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MUSIC

REVOLUTIONS



TIMBALAND

TIMBALAND PRESENTS *SHOCK VALUE*
BLACKGROUND/MOSLEY MUSIC GROUP
BY SEAN FENNESSEY

At this moment, Virginia-born producer Timbaland is the biggest dog in the biggest room in the biggest house. The architect of two of 2006's biggest, bravest albums, Nelly Furtado's slicky *Loose* (Geffen) and Justin Timberlake's masterful post-Prince nod *FutureSex/LoveSounds* (Jive), Tim circumvented the "urban" platform for the first time in his career and dominated pop radio, while still crafting smart, fundamentally "black" dance music.

Illustration by ROB KELLY

Shock Value is Tim's fifth album as a performer, and while his profile is as high and as important as it's ever been, he's still clearly hungry for something. On *Shock*, he's a producer in the hip hop sense, but also in the classical sense — à la Quincy Jones — masterminding the collision of several disparate talents. He's also a rapper, singer, beatboxer, and so on. That he's better at some of these things than others is obvious. But the tension between them is what defines *Shock Value* and, by extension, Timbaland today.

Justin Timberlake shows up on three songs, acting as a stabilizing force, including on the boomeranging "Give It to Me" alongside Furtado and Tim (who flings darts at unnamed rivals), and later, on the album's big, bold banger, "Bounce." That song features Dr. Dre and longtime Tim collaborator Missy Elliott respectively whispering, growling, and rollicking over a bass-heavy stomp and a sound effect that sounds like a dolphin in heat. Timberlake's hook is foolish genius: "Bounce like your ass got the hiccups," putting the song in the league of Jay-Z's 2000 "Big Pimpin'" and Missy Elliott's 2001 "Get Ur Freak On," Tim's mightiest rap productions.

But not all of Tim's directness is a blessing. As a rapper, Timbaland is mechanical and emotionless, as though he'd like to maintain anonymity. The great irony is that his productions have always been just the opposite, rumbling with creativity, adventure, wit, personality. Tim knows this — as he rapped on 1998's "Here We Come," "He said that 'Timbaland can't rap' / But I don't care... I make dope tracks." On *Shock*, though, Timbaland has pushed

Timbaland is a producer in the hip hop sense, but also in the classical sense — à la Quincy Jones — masterminding the collision of several disparate talents.

your beats for fun" (presumably speaking to producer Scott Storch, with whom he's been quibbling), over a languid arrangement of operatic vocals and thumping drums. Later, on the kinetic "Board Meeting" he actually sings, begging a prospective lover, "Let me seduce you / Let me play in your hair." "Fantasy" and "Miscommunication" are also swooning, romance-driven pop songs — they feel like perhaps Mr. Mosley has recently fallen in love. But though his whooshing, mouth-made drums are perfect for high drama, his melodies aren't quite there, lacking the emotional bite necessary for a suite of songs about sex and romance.

But these are merely album cuts, with none of the brightness or star appeal of his collaborations — and Timbaland knows that, too. "Scream," featuring his latest signee Keri and The Pussycat Dolls' Nicole Scherzinger, is alluring, if repetitious, with a whirling sexuality. There's Swedish rock band The Hives on the brief, breakneck "Throw It On Me," and Chicago emo-pop band Fall Out Boy on "One And Only," which is infectious, even if it's just the band's barrel-chested quasi-punk mashed with Tim's skittering drums. But the stalker tale "Time," with Los Angeles synth-pop duo She Wants Revenge, is vacant and tuneless.

"2 Man Show" is a quietly pretty pairing of Timbaland's hushed percussion and some showy piano playing by Elton John. But John never sings; instead the song features a vibrant choir and Tim's banal ad-libbed braggadocios. It's a cred-grab, and little else, much like *Shock Value* itself — a vehicle for Timbaland to prove he's a "real" musician and a pop star, not "just" a hip hop producer. But he needn't work so hard at it. There's no shame in just making hits.



MARQUES HOUSTON

VETERAN

UNIVERSAL MOTOWN

You don't take Marques Houston seriously, and he knows it. He strives to exude sensuality, confidence, and experience in his music, but it's hard to shake visions of the irksome kid from *Sister, Sister*, or, at best, the man-child from (now defunct) IMX, a group whose sole function was to give pubescent girls a name to pencil

into the hearts on their notebooks. To remedy this, Houston deployed the shop-worn child-star strategy of going full-frontal on his last album, *Naked*. Now, wisely, he's dressing himself in grown-folks threads.

On *Veteran*, his third solo disc, he jettisons the soft-core lyrics for a classier sound. While the lead

single, "Favorite Girl," is generic, marred by limp, unfocused production, Houston emerges unscathed, thanks to winsome, self-assured vocals. He sounds refreshingly guileless here, particularly on the guttural "Always & Forever," one of few tracks charming enough to match Houston's beaming personality. The melody of Sam Cooke's "You Send Me" lends "So Right for Me" its breezy hook, and, like Cooke before him, Houston sounds sexier when he isn't working so damn hard at it. If only he had a clue.

Joshua Alston



THA DOGG POUND

DOGG CHIT

KOCH

Since their 1995 debut, *Dogg Food* (Death Row), Kurupt and Daz Dillinger have cooked from the same recipe, but with diminishing spice. Endlessly enamored with guns and pussy, the duo slather their seventh album with a vague glossiness that forgoes detail, color, or convincing realism. To be sure, few are better at calling a "bitch" a

"bitch" than the DPgz, but consistency often begets caricature. There are moments when their energy and attitude carry the day — "Homicide, shootings, Colombian neckties / Dumping random drive-bys," Kurupt snarls over the thunderous timpani of "I N 1 Out" — but most bodies drop bloodlessly and panties slide ankle-bound with

the ersatz eroticism of late-night programming on Cinemax.

Sidestepping the sample-heavy warmth of traditional West Coast music, Daz's production is the same as it's always been: lean and rubbery. It works best on "Vibe With A Pimp," a slinky number with sunny synths and a whispery hook courtesy of Snoop Dogg. The DPgz come alive when they play host, and the LP welcomes luminaries like Too Short, Bad Azz, and The Game, who declares, "My rag is like a flag / I should hang / From the fucking Eiffel Tower," over the Chronic-esque strings and keys of "Anybody Killa." Gangbanging in Paris is interesting. Artistic redundancy? Not so much.

Ben Detrick



MACY GRAY **BIG**
WILLIAM MUSIC GROUP/GEFFEN

Music's one of the few gigs where being a little wacko can be a blessing — and Macy Gray knows it. Since 1999's *On How Life Is* (Epic), a near-perfect debut, Gray's been a darkly funny, intermittently messy, and idiosyncratic stylist. These qualities are unlikely strengths, but they're oddly muted on her first album of original

material since 2003's *The Trouble With Being Myself* (Epic). This new, inappropriately measured approach is most obvious on "Shoo Be Doo" and "One," the latter co-produced by Ron Fikri and Will Lam (who do much of the song's heavy lifting). Sugary and nauseatingly sprightly, these chirpy confections are the answer to the

question "What would Macy sound like if she were singing in a Ramada inn lounge while hooked up to a Weibutrin drip?" Things are better when Gray lets her freak flag fly, as on the fuzz-guitar-fueled "Get Out." Also, "Ghetto Love" is a refreshing bit of uncontrolled soul, despite a grunting chorus — the lifestyles-of-the-nasty-and-strapped approach has always been a better fit for Macy's raspy voice and raucous POV. She'd have been better served celebrating those traits instead of containing them.

Amy Linden



CHUCK BROWN **WE'RE ABOUT THE BUSINESS**
RAW VENTURE

Chuck Brown's lone R&B club hit, 1978's horn-n-drums throw-down "Bustin' Loose," has unfairly defined him for nearly 30 years. But the veteran rhythm and blues guitarist's relevance goes far beyond the Billboard charts — he's the godfather of the swinging, Washington D.C.-based percussive funk known as go-go, little appreciated

outside his hometown. On *We're About The Business*, his first newly recorded studio project since 1983, Brown shows little rust: He remains a soulful ax-man with a wicked sense of humor. It's this sly combination that allows Brown to pull off a tongue-in-cheek, in-the-pocket version of the romantic "Love Theme" from the 1972 soundtrack to *The*

Godfather. He's also still capable of setting off the barbecue with the refreshingly cheesy, feel-good "Black Party": "We ain't trying / To hurt nobody, officer," he sings in his cool trademark growl. One-time Bad Boy producer Carl "Chucky" Thompson gives a contemporary gleam to this material, though one could do without hearing Brown rap on the plodding "Chuck Baby." Brown is at his best on the loose, groove-heavy, call-and-response celebration "The Party Roll" — just the kind of jam that will have folks doing the water dance for days on end.

Keith Murphy



NOISETTES
WHAT'S THE TIME MR. WOLF
UNIVERSAL MOTOWN

Now that rock 'n' roll is irrelevant as subculture, everyone else (read, nonwhites, chicks) is suddenly welcome to the party. Thus, it's hardly revolutionary that on this punk trio's debut, black British singer/bassist Shingai

Shoniwa sounds a mix of Siouxsie Sioux and Poly Styrene. Plus, the band's freak-metalists give props to Rosetta Tharpe, that other leading sista-rocka-of-the-moment, on stand-out cut "Sister Rosetta (Capture the Spirit)." Elsewhere, "Nothing to

Dread," with its ringing twang, and "Mind the Gap," sporting mesmerizing arabesque flourishes, are promising. Throughout, Shoniwa is a provocative ringmaster, and *Mr. Wolf* is her high-wire liberation session.

Kandia Crazy Horse

VARIOUS ARTISTS BACKSPIN: A SIX DEGREES 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY PROJECT

SIX DEGREES



Six Degrees, the well-regarded world/electronic label, has a tendency to be too tasteful for its own good. But on *Backspin*, the label's roster covers its favorite English-language songs, and the result is a fun, boundless experiment.

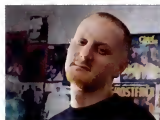
Indian techno wizards Midival Punditz turn Led Zeppelin's 1971 chummer "Four Sticks" into an electric tour of Bollywood, while Spanish gypsy outfit Ojos de Brujo (above) contribute a sexy pan-Latin version of Bob Marley's 1973 "Get Up,

Stand Up." Not everything here works — an endless Banco de Gaia cover of Pink Floyd's 1971 song "Echoes" is plodding and textureless — but it's a treat to hear these artists escape their geographical straitjacket for a change. Matt Cibula

MARCO POLO

PORT AUTHORITY

RAVAKUS/SOLSPAZM



Resist thinking of Toronto-born producer Marco Polo as a defiant purist. Though he prefers quiet loops to synths and clanging aluminum beats, he's more like a reflective historian. Polo preserves ancient beat-making techniques — dusty samples, crisp

snarers, and an MC's quiet seriousness — on his debut LP, where forgotten technicians such as O.C. and Kool G Rap acquit themselves nicely on their guest appearances. It's only when younger voices join in — the brutally nostalgic Kardinal Offishall on

"War" and J'Davey on "Relax," a limp remake of A Tribe Called Quest's 1993 "Electric Relaxation" — that it's clear this is just an exercise in senior celebration — albeit an exciting one — with no room for tomorrow.

Rodney Dugue



JENNIFER LOPEZ

COMO AMA UNA MUJER

EPIC

Origin and authenticity have long been hot topics for Jennifer Lopez. But until this, her first Spanish-language album, her self-inquiry hasn't progressed much beyond a.) she's Jenny from the block, and b.) she's real 'cause she's real.

Meant as an exploration of her Latina heritage, *Como Ama Una Mujer*'s power ballads don't experiment with Latin pop so much as adorn familiar American musical tropes with Spanish translations. Forgivable is Lopez's propensity to pronounce each word within an inch of its

life, the urge to over-compensate for nonspeakers is outweighed only by a seeming fear of embarrassment at faltering around natives. Less deserving of absolution is the music, which is tacky and overproduced. Grandiose numbers like "Qué Hiciste" are decorated with lazy guitar flourishes. "Te Voy A Querer" triply plays with crisp proto-reggaeton percussion, but that verve soon swells to indulgent cinematic orchestration. Worse still is the album's title track, where Lopez's pitch-controlled vocals sound closer to Celine

Dion than to Celia Cruz.

The songwriting here far outstrips Lopez's previous albums, though. (Estefano and Julio Reyes split most of the duties). And, to her credit, Lopez's thin vocals never lack feeling or conviction.

"Sola" ("Alone") is *Como*'s most ambitious song, bristling with atmospheric keyboards that complement the confusion and distress of the lyrics: "Me queda seguir / Esperar, y cambiar y llorar y dejarlo todo / Quitarme el llanto de mis ojos," which roughly translates to "I'm left waiting, changing, crying and leaving / Losing the tears in my eyes." Yet, whether she's (over)matched with husband and executive producer Marc Anthony's powerful vocals on "Por Arriesgarlos" or hemmed in by an overprocessed studio sound elsewhere, one is still left to wonder what Lopez might sound like truly solo. *Pete L'Officiel*



LIFESAVAS

QUARANTAM PROJECTS

GUTTERFLY: THE ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK

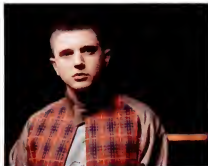
If rope chains, Jordan Vs, and 8-ball jackets can make a comeback, why can't conscious rap? To that end, Portland, Ore.'s Lifesavas impressively go radical on their '70s blaxploitation-themed sophomore album, *Gutterfly*. Inspired by the era's heated politics, MCs Vursatyl and Jumbo deliver a concept LP set in

fictional "Razorblade City." They exchange slang-encrypted slick talk with Camp Lo on the title cut and pump their fists alongside dead prez and Living Colour's Vernon Reid on "Freedom Walk." "Erase that shame / Show 'em you love being black," exhorts Jumbo on the latter, turning dramatic piano chords and Reid's wailing electric guitar

into the soundtrack for a black power rally.

But the most penetrating moments here are on the guest-less tracks. A gem of sped-up soul, buoyed by a single-bar piano loop and chipmunk vocal chorus, "Long Letter" finds the duo pouring their hearts out to missed loved ones, both deceased and overseas at war. And on the pulsating "Shine Language," their flows are explosive, as both men attack the staccato beat's strings. By the *De La Soul*-esque finale, "Celebrate," their experiment in throwback-ism is a success; they've managed to make "positive" rap without the negative connotations.

timmhotep aku



PLAN B

WHO NEEDS ACTIONS WHEN YOU GOT WORDS

CORLEONE STREET

White London rapper Plan B is like Eminem with a guitar slung over his shoulder, his cynical and intimate coming-of-age tales

are a welcome twist on British rap. On his bleak debut, B raps about family trauma ("Mama [Loves a Crackhead]") and

juvenile delinquency ("Kidz") with sharp, life-hardened skill. "I talk so loud, I talk so coarse / I show no regret, I show no remorse," he spits on "Sick 2 Det." And on songs like the jilted-seducing "Charmaine," he sings his hooks in a softly lilting and melodic tone, managing to bring light to his darkly humorous stories.

Mosi Reeves



BRICK & LACE

LOVE IS WICKED

WOLFE/IRIS/GOFFEN

On their captivating debut, Jamaican sisters Nailah and Nyanda Thorne lay down seamless, deliciously girlish harmonies atop rugged dancehall rhythms, with lyrics tougher than their gossamer vocals let on. With songs that are catchy and taut, these sisters suffer no fools, but are willing to go the distance for that rarest

of species: the Good Man. Sure, it's a limited thematic repertory, and on the plodding "Never Hard," the beeping, never as acrylic tips, gets tiresome. But a little nagging's a small price to pay for an album that vibrates with this kind of infectious energy. Helping to bring it are the tireless will.i.am, Akon (responsible for the swaying warning

shot "Get That Clear"), and old-school vets Full Force, who dip into Althea & Donna's 1978 reggae classic "Up Town Top Ranking" to pull out the shimmering "Don't Stop." It's all great, but this album's heart and soul is "Mr. Officer," a song about the perils of police custody. The anguish — "Don't you know you're cutting off my lifeline?" — amplified by Cool and Dre's modulated beat is desperate and defiant, and it resonates long after the album ends.

Amy Linden

LIFESAVAS: AMANCA LOPEZ; BRICK & LACE: MARIO PELICCI; PLAN B: DENISE O'CALLAGHAN



Dr. Steffanie Seaver PSY.D. is an expert in the area of interpersonal relationships. Researcher, author and accomplished public speaker, she has lectured nationwide for over a decade. Dr. Seaver has also been involved with several publications covering relationship and lifestyle issues.

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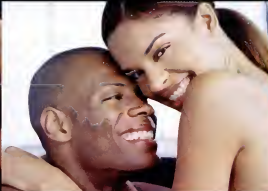
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Dear Steffanie,

I know a lot of men read your column and could really benefit from this important STAMINA secret my boyfriend and I recently discovered.

As much as I hate to throw him under the bus, my boyfriend's sexual performance was less than adequate when it came to his "timing". He tried hard to please me and I can tell that he believed he was doing a great job, which is why it was difficult for me to tell him the truth.

We've been together for about a year but last month, after what he thought was a "strong effort" for a Saturday afternoon, I couldn't help but be disappointed and I let him know there could be a bit of a gap between his perception of his sexual performance and our SEXUAL REALITY.

I told him that I love him but when it came to the "duration" of our lovemaking, I was often left feeling extremely frustrated - he always "got his" and that if he could "hold out" just a little longer, maybe I could "get mine."

He said he always thought that when he "punched the clock", he was pulling a "full shift." Of course, he was shocked by this huge blow to his ego but after some serious sulking and a whole lot of denial, he realized his sexual stamina really could use some improvement.

"I know he feels great knowing I'm completely satisfied and HE'S the reason why."

He was serious about improving his performance so he did some research and spoke to a doctor friend of his. His friend told him about a number of cheap desensitizing lubricants on the market that might help his stamina and performance but were known to possibly hurt erection quality and worse, they tend to numb a woman - which as far as I'm concerned, defeats the whole purpose! Great, so now he'd be able to last longer but I'd be numb too! That was the last thing our relationship needed!

His doctor friend also told him that if he really wanted to improve his control and performance and still maintain maximum firmness, he should try a new product called Vivaxa from the makers of Maxoderm (the #1 topical male enhancement product that's recommended by Leading Physician, Michael A. Savino, M.D., F.A.C.S. for instantly improving erection quality). The ingredients in this new "sex stamina secret" make it different from other products because it contains a clinically tested ingredient that is unlike anything else on

the planet! It actually HELPS erection quality and firmness. And best of all, the formula absorbs super fast upon application so it won't numb a woman! Improved erection quality AND enhanced stamina - it seemed too good to be true!

My boyfriend got a sample and that weekend we tried it. From the very first application, he felt more firm and full than ever before - by the time we'd finished making love, I'D GOTTEN MINE TWICE! Needless to say, this has been a record breaking month for us. I know he feels great knowing that I'm completely satisfied and he's the reason why. And trust me, his confidence wasn't the only thing that shot through the roof!

So Steffanie, please print this letter - I'm sure there's a ton of women out there wishing their men used Vivaxa, a quality control and performance enhancing product that lets him put in the extra time without numbing her! I know they're still offering a FREE MONTH SUPPLY* if you call 1-800-805-9670 or visit their website at www.MaxodermVIVAXA.com. Tell your readers to hurry because supplies were limited when I called.

Pamela B., Nashville, TN

*Dear Readers,

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YOUNG BUCK *BUCK THE WORLD*

G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE

Young Buck began his stint with G-Unit as the Furio to 50 Cent's Tony Soprano: an out-of-town enforcer valued for brutality and fearlessness, if not leadership potential. Seasons change, though, and with his second solo album, the Nashville product is now expected — by both merit and necessity — to become 50's most trusted lieutenant. Buck has responded to this pressure with an album that, while imperfect, is nonetheless the best G-Unit release since his own platinum-selling 2004 debut.

A nasty bastard who rarely bothers with clever wordplay, complex rhyme schemes, or high-minded conceptualism, Buck succeeds when he lets his emotions spill. More adroit at expressing anger, pain, and sorrow than, say, bemusement, he

doesn't so much share feelings as watch them seep from between his clenched fingers. "Look at what I call my life / A Glock 9 and a 8-ball of white," he spits on the title track, a Jake One-produced slab of '70s East Coast soul over which Buck turns his inability to provide for his child into motivation for criminality. Even better is "Slow Ya Roll," a dive into the birth water of his patios. Backed by reverberating guitars and softly slapped snares, he laments the fates of an uncle who went insane in the Navy, an incarcerated aunt with AIDS, and a cousin whose skeleton was discovered in a corn field. Here, Buck eases nuance into his coarsely sluggish, one-dimensional persona — his callous exterior revealed as scar tissue.

Buck's raspy growl is equally commanding, but less

compelling, on club anthems. The coupling of Young Jeezy with DJ Toomp's synth brass on "Pocket Full of Paper" is a hollow cliché. And when Dr. Dre delivers a delicate arrangement of keys and a creeping, irregular guitar on "U Ain't Goin' Nowhere," Buck is so convinced that his cocksmanhood and credit cards will atone for his philandering ways that one aches for a consequence that, sadly, never arrives. Had the object of his (anti-) affection slashed his ties, melted down his medallions, and run off with Lloyd Banks, things might have been different. Which is to say: until Young Buck learns to wrestle meaning from life's countless obstacles, he'll continue to toil as hired muscle, a loyal soldier lacking the magnetism of a true boss.

Ben Detrick


BEBEL GILBERTO *MOMENTO*

SIX DEGREES

There's a dangerously thin line that separates the transcendental innocence of soulful lounge music from the emptiness of New-Age fluff. Until now, the daughter of bossa nova pioneer João Gilberto had displayed, with her first two albums of seminal electro-bossa, impeccable taste and grace. But this overcooked third

effort crosses the line, at times recalling the most forgettable aspects of late-era Sade. The tacky "Os Novos Yorkinos," for instance, is Gilberto's goofiest moment since she recorded "The Girl From Ipanema" with Kenny G. *Momento*, though, isn't a complete bust. There's always Gilberto's voice — smoky, velvety, infinitely sensuous — and her ability to find depth in glorious nuggets of Brazil's musical past. Her take on Chico Buarque's classic 1972 "Caçada" is luminous and warm. And a collaboration with Sabina Sciubba and Didi Gutman of New York's Brazilian Girls on "Bring Back The Love" — a gorgeous combination of lazy bossa inflections with liquid electronic textures — exploits Gilberto's strengths to maximum effect. The more Gilberto's warm tone invokes Brazil's past, the more she shines. But when her quest to be modern obscures it, it's a strike against her family's legacy.

Ernesto Lechner


ANTHONY HAMILTON *SOUTHERN COMFORT*

IMPERIAL/MCA/ATLANTIC

North Carolina soul man Anthony Hamilton sings with an aching sort of fragility — as gripping as it is contradictory. His gorgeously fractured voice can be barroom cool (2003's "Lucille") or tortured and holy (2005's "Ain't Nobody Worryin'"). But Hamilton has always been a "vintage" artist, leaning on old soul tropes to convey meaning. Throughout

this previously unreleased album, recorded between 2000 and 2002, Hamilton's ages-old voice sounds younger, fresher — less beset by his old habits. And he proves himself ardent and unafraid to expose himself. On the psychedelic, Bill Withers-esque "They Don't Know," he warmly belts about his insecurities, while on

"Never Give Up," he offers a surprising confession: "Been touched again, rained on me / Down on my luck, got chains on me / I lost a job to gain a child / The road is long but I'm losing time." Though it's sometimes self-indulgent, this is a deeply personal work, revealing and pained in a way his other albums haven't been. From the verdant swoon of "Why," packed with inward ponderings ("Why can't they just let me be?" he sings on the chorus), to the far-gone lasciviousness of "Glad U Called," *Southern Comfort* beams with a naked, unvarnished beauty. And it carries dignity and defiance he's only hinted at since. *Will Dukey*

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IT'S THEIR THING: Rashid and Erick

BY ALL MEANS NECESSARY

ESSENTIAL EPMD

In hip hop's late '80s Golden-Age classroom, EPMD were the kids sitting in the middle row. While Chuck D and KRS-One called teachers on their bullshit, N.W.A brawled in the hallway, De La Soul snickered in the back, Big Daddy Kane scooped honeys by the window, and Rakim freestyled in the corner, Erick Sermon and Parrish Smith pulled their fisherman's hats down over their eyes and minded their own business.

For EPMD, aka Erick and Parrish Making Dollars, their every-kid personas were the backdrop and the track was the story — shifty, rumbling funk featuring crowd-pleasing samples and randomly witty lyrics delivered in slow-flowing monotone. While Smith was a solid battle MC, Sermon's slightly dazed effect and noticeable lisp gave his rhymes a playful, childlike quality — on 1988's "It's My Thing," he rapped: "Enough about that, let's get on to somethin' better / And if it gets warm, take off the hot sweater / And if you want some water, I'll get you a cup / And if you don't want it, then burn the hell up."

From the mixed-race suburb of Brentwood, Long Island, EPMD eased onto the scene with 1988's *Strictly Business* (Priority). Their ambling, bass line-driven sound — just as suited for cars as clubs — predated Dr. Dre's signature West Coast stroll, and

the woozy, echo-drenched "You Gots to Chill" used the Cali party phrase "More Bounce to the Ounce" by Zapp. (Even more creatively, "You're a Customer" rode the bass and drums of ZZ Top's "Cheap Sunglasses.") Both Sermon and Smith had production skills, but as Sermon has said, engineer Charlie Marotta was the primary architect of those loping grooves. Their 1989 follow-up, *Unfinished Business* (Priority), had even more of a collageist thump.

As hip hop polarized in the early '90s — with both pop pandering and gangsta posturing — EPMD gave their snares a harder snap and their rhymes a more firearm-friendly edge. The '92 hit "Crossover," from *Business Never Personal* (Def Jam), self-consciously shunned sell-outs and celebrated "strictly underground funk." From teenage innocents to grown-up careerists, EPMD never wavered; they were always about the dopest sound in the speaker.

Charles Aaron

HIGHER LEARNING

"THE STEVE MARTIN" (*Strictly Business*, 1988)
 "GET THE BOZACK" (*Unfinished Business*, 1989)
 "IT'S GOING DOWN" (*Like Original Soundtrack*, 1992)
 "K.I.M." (*Back in Business*, 1997)
 "SYMPHONY 2000" (featuring Redman, Method Man, and Lady Luck (*Out of Business*, 1999))



VARIOUS ARTISTS

VICE

ED REC VOL. 1
ED REC VOL. 2

There's something awkwardly ecstatic about Ed Banger Records, the fashionable French electronic label founded by Daft Punk member Pedro "Busy P" Winter, that is both deft and daft when it comes to dance music. Its artists that are clearly emulating the Daft Punk aesthetic, but whereas DP's post-disco is a systematic

reassembling, most of the songs here are merely loose, ill-conceived spurts. On Vol. 1, DJ Mehdi's "I Am Somebody" has a pulsing, Cerrone-esque backbeat but no trace of second-tier grooves, while SebastiAn's "Dolami" has a perfectly serpentine melody but no rhythm. This is barren dance music not made for actual dancing.

Sean Fennessey



GILLIE DA KID

BAWYGRANCE

THE BEST OF THE
GDK MIXTAPES

Look past the Cash Money Records put-downs and the Chappelle's Show-worthy song titles — Gillie Da Kid is more than his headlines. This release from the Major Figgas member and self-proclaimed Lil Wayne ghostwriter is an engrossing collection of mixtape cuts, revealing a rapper with a ravishing hunger for success

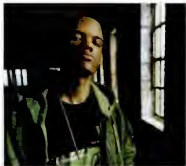
and, occasionally, the skills to match.

Gillie deftly mixes Philly street lore with heartfelt exaltations and a splash of social consciousness — sometimes within the same verse. He's vicious on the Jay-Z-sampling "Holla Back," a track as furious and catchy as Cassidy's "I'm a Hustla." But on the 'hood proclamation "I Love Being

a Gangsta Pt. 2," Gillie reflectively raps, "Listen shortly, you got the wrong feeling if you think gangsta's just about guns and killing... It's gangsta when you take care of your children."

But *THE GDK MIXTAPES* is not without its foibles. Despite its brevity, the album is long on stale crime rhymes — an unfortunate fact considering Gillie was recently arrested on charges of conspiracy and possession of narcotics with intent to deliver. That said, after years of toiling underground, Gillie sounds as if he's ready to step out — that is, if only he gets the chance.

Damien Scott



RICH BOY

RICH BOY

INTERVIEW: ZONE 4

The art of collaboration: It's the gift and the curse of hip hop. Sometimes you get Nas' *Illmatic* (Columbia, 1994). Sometimes you get Timbaland and Magoo. Take Rich Boy: His debut album is brilliantly flawed. On one hand the Alabama MC has made one of the most exciting, innovative albums of the year, full of surprises and wonder. Problem is, he doesn't provide any of them. They come courtesy of the album's primary producer, Atlanta's Polow Da Don.

Consider the album-opening "The

Madness": Most producers would start after laying down the track's majestic keyboards and lurching beat. But Polow goes one or two (or five) steps beyond that, adding and subtracting elements throughout. His production betrays a deep love and understanding of the visceral power of the rap beat. It's like Polow can conjure hip hop's long history with a flick of the wrist. "Boy Looka Here" backs Rich's taunts with the sound of the Grambling Marching Band going off to war. Later, he goes minimal with a

beat box — à la Doug E. Fresh's "La Di Da Di."

As an MC, Rich has an undiluted Alabama drawl. His rhymes vary from the mildly provocative (from "Madness": "Sweet home Alabama / Yeah, I love her / Still try and hug her even though she ain't my color") to the mediocre and informative (from "Role Model": "I don't wear tight shirts with cuff links"). It might not be a ringing endorsement to say he stays out of the way of the music — but thankfully he does. With the exception of the smash "Throw Some D's," there's hardly a memorable vocal hook on here. But that's not a problem — were this album littered with quotables, it might have buried some of these extraordinary sounds.

Chris Ryan



MAVIS STAPLES

WE'LL NEVER TURN BACK

ART:

Ever since stepping out with the Staples Singers in 1948, Mavis Staples has sung with a fiercely evocative contralto. On her

eighth solo album, Staples brilliantly covers civil rights standards like "We Shall Not Be Moved" with a strong backing

ensemble that includes Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Ry Cooder. But *We'll Never Turn Back* is not just an ode to political gains; it's an affirmation of Staples' life and work that examines history's hymns with rattle-voiced hindsight. On "98 and a 1/2" she breaks melody to testify: "It's the 21st Century / It feels like it's 1960 / Broken leaves... Freedom now!" Even as she mourns Katrina, hope remains the strongest quality in Staples' voice — and this album trembles with it.

Julianne Shepherd



VARIOUS ARTISTS

"LIVE! CONVENTION '77-'79"

THE GOLDEN REAL

Dissatisfied with the sound quality of pre-studio live hip hop recordings, producer Kenny Wilson (above) spent much of 1979 remastering his favorite MCs' verses by splicing them with original breakbeat records.

He recently discovered "Live! Convention '77-'79" is an interesting, if frustratingly skewed, glimpse of rap's mostly undocumented formative years. Though the beats are blistering and the primitive rhymes are infectious (and uncred-

ited), certain defining qualities of the old-school live tape are lost in translation. Wilson's mix not only strips a layer of lo-fi charm, it effectively removes any trace of the true park-jam stars — the original DJs. Andrew Nosihrsky

MIMS

MUSIC IS MY SAVIOR

CAPTOL/AMERICAN KING



Yet another contender for New York's elusive crown, it's clear from his bouncy hit, "This Is Why I'm Hot" — featuring the infamous couplet "I'm hot 'cause I'm fly / You ain't 'cause you not" — that MIMS isn't angling for

lyrical supremacy. At first it's charming — he's post-lyrics. But, the Washington Heights MC's reliance on bare-bones production and a heavy Southern influence on strip-club anthems like "It's Alright" make this a

tapid debut. Later, on "Just Like That," his lyrical ineptitude hits rock bottom: "I'm looking for that sunshine but I ain't Li!" Flipper / Yeah, I'm a star but I'm not the Li' Dipper." Ouch.

Chris Yuscavage



THE NIGHTWATCHMAN

ONE MAN REVOLUTION

EPIC

The on-again/off-again Rage Against the Machine and Audioslave guitarist Tom Morello is a visionary technician of the highest order, able to conjure dazzling, crackling sounds from his instrument at any

turn. A first listen to this all-acoustic solo debut may disappoint feed-back fans, but Morello, singing for the first time, delivers these songs with ragged grace, yelping like some forlorn combination of Nick Cave and

Richie Havens. His lyrics, like those on the blood-soaked "House Gone Up in Flames," are stark and sharply drawn and reveal a seething firebrand hiding beneath that cap and ax.

Sean Fennessey

BOOMSHOTS

Reggae Riddims & Reality
by Rob KennerBEAMING GOLD:
Aldonia on stage

"I stay in the streets, son," says **JOHNNY WONDER**, who has been the proverbial man behind the scenes for some of dancehall reggae's biggest recent breakthroughs. A New York native with ties to King Jammy's camp in Kingston, Jamaica, Wonder — who has been a promoter, a producer, a DJ, and a manager — broke records like Pinchers' "Bandelero" and Bounty Killer's "Copper Shot" in the U.S. and executive-produced Killer's classic *My Xperience* (TVT), forging lasting links between the rap and reggae undergrounds. "The streets have been good to me," he adds.

Stepping off the snowy sidewalks of Times Square, Wonder enters the outer-space-themed restaurant Mars 2112. It's a fitting spot to welcome Tony Matterhorn, aka "The Man From Mars," a rising dancehall star who's returning to NYC after a three-year absence due to visa troubles. Matterhorn's smash, "Dutty Wine," came out of nowhere last year to outperform numerous major-label-backed projects on the sheer strength of street buzz.

"We need some new excitement in the reggae business," says Wonder, smiling as the video lights zero in on Matterhorn, who heads up a fresh wave of talent gathered together on Wonder's new CD/DVD, *Dancehall Draft Picks* (VP). Shot entirely on the streets of Kingston, *Draft Picks* combines interviews and raw performance footage with music videos produced for Jamaican TV. It's the perfect introduction to

rising stars such as Mavado, Busy Signal, Hollow Point, and Aldonia.

Dancehall's new generation building on the legacy of its musical forefathers: Beenie, Bounty, and Buju. Aldonia traces his ambition to become an entertainer back to the famous clash between Bounty Killer and Beenie Man at Sting 1993. "Killer was my artist from me was a juvenile," says Aldonia, who went on to record a blazing duet with his idol titled "From Dem Dis," which is included on *Draft Picks*.

Though Beenie and Bounty channeled their rivalry into memorable music, friction among younger artists has threatened to spill over into physical conflict. "That need to stop," says Aldonia. "We nah go dwell on the war thing. Each artist f elevate them thing to reach pon a different level."

"Nobody's trying to bring back them golden-era days," Wonder says as Matterhorn is rushed by the media inside Mars 2112. "Somebody has to make some new golden-era days. That's what the business needs now, and that's what we're doing."

HEAVY ROTATION

PERFECT Giddimani (Tads)
RICHIE SPICE in *The Streets to Africa* (VP)

VARIOUS ARTISTS *D-Life*

Presents Extreme Soca

Volume One (Penalty)

BARRINGTON LEVY

Immunity (Roc-A-Fella)

DAVILLE *On My Mind* (VP)



CONSEQUENCE

Columbus/O.O.D. Red Ink

DON'T QUIT
YOUR DAY JOB!

"Getting good head while watching *Good Morning America*." That's Consequence talking about his lifestyle on "The Good The Bad The Ugly." But despite his taste in morning television, on his major label solo debut the Queens-bred rapper presents a relatable version of his life on wax. Which is kind of the problem; it sounds too much like

everyone else's life.

When Kanye West, whose G.O.O.D. Music imprint is 'Quence's home, dropped *The College Dropout* (Roc-A-Fella, 2004), his everyman approach was somehow epic. Too many of the Average Joe MCs that have followed have been unable to equal his brand of extravagant normalcy. And Consequence, after

more than 10 years in the on-deck circle — he first broke as a latter-day member of A Tribe Called Quest — seems uninterested in swinging for the fences. Littered with older tracks, like "Callin' Me," Don't Quit is too cobbled together for someone waiting so long for his shot.

Consequence never wants for witty punch lines. But when his tales of gun-toting and number runs slide up next to shopping-bag-toting and McDonald's runs, the dramatic tension seeps out of his voice. Take "Grammy Family": At first, 'Quence sounds comfortable matching Kanye's alpha-flossing. But a few bars in, being the pace — being fabulous is hard work.

Chris Ryan



THE HEATMAKERZ

MAJOR KEY ENTERTAINMENT/
RED INK

THE RUSH

In a way, Harlem production duo The Heatmakerz are as responsible for the rise of Dipset as anything Cam'Ron and Jim Jones have done. Their ecstatic productions — breakneck soul samples multiplied by dense, muddy snare hits — lit up the Dips' 2003 debut, *Diplomatic Immunity* (Roc-A-Fella), like a pinball machine, and the New York crew

never looked back. The Heatmakerz craft extravagantly simple productions — in the vein of Marley Marl and Pete Rock — strung out on performance-enhancing drugs. Since '03, members Rsonist and Thrilla have worked steadily, but have rarely matched that early, propulsive, New York-centric sound. *The Rush* is their third, and so far best, release in a

series of street albums, and the first to feature Rsonist as an MC. On the wobbly, organ-pumping "Back 2 Business," he ably hangs with the more vivacious Peedi Crakk and Jae Millz, if unable to match his counterparts' charisma.

Still, there's nothing new here; even the most effective songs, like the saccharine "All I Know," wouldn't have made the cut on their earliest best tapes. And dalliances with nearly forgotten Thug&B duo The Product G&B are misguided, bumbling attempts to update their sound, derailing an otherwise rattling set of hard rap. By rule, The Heatmakerz need to let the samples sing for themselves.

Sean Fennessey

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VIXEN: "TALK TO HER"

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FASHION: "FANTASTIC VOYAGE"

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PAGE 106: Jacket, price available upon request, lingerie set, sunglasses, not for retail, and belt, \$795, all by **DOLCE & GABBANA** (dolcegabbana.it); earrings, \$175, by **ALEXIS BITTAR** (alexisbittar.com); sandals, \$655, by **BARBARA BUI** (barbarabui.com).

PAGE 108: Dress, price available upon request, by **MAXMARA** (866-MAXMARA); earrings, \$215, necklace, \$350, and bangles, \$175-225, all by **ALEXIS BITTAR** (alexisbittar.com).

PAGE 110: Dress, \$2,375, lights, \$55, and sandals, \$96, all by **GIVENCHY**, at Macy's, Los Angeles, (310-274-8800); white cuff, \$45, and silver bangle, \$120, by **ISAAC MANEVITZ FOR BEN-AMUN** (ben-amun.com); white bangle, \$55, and clear bangles, \$55 each, all by **R.J. GRAZIANO** (rjgraziano.com); white resin bangle, \$275, and silver bangle, \$225-\$300, both by **ALEXIS BITTAR** (alexisbittar.com).

THIS PAGE: Dress, price available upon request, by **DOLCE & GABBANA** (dolcegabbana.it); XL disc bangle, not for retail, and earrings and bangle, \$225-\$300, both by **ALEXIS BITTAR** (alexisbittar.com); sunglasses, price available upon request, by **KIKI ROYAL EYEWEAR**, NYC (347-517-6859).

VIBE® magazine (ISSN 1070-4701) is published monthly by VIBE Media Group, LLC, 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to VIBE magazine, Box 5687, Harlem, Iowa 51593-1187. Regular subscription rate is \$14.95 per year. Foreign subscription rates are: Canada \$24.00 in U.S. dollars; all other countries \$59.00 payable in advance in U.S. funds. GST# R125 160309. Vol. 15, No. 5 Copy-right© 2007 VIBE Media Group, LLC. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be copied or reproduced without permission from VIBE. Subscription requests, address changes, and adjustments should be directed to VIBE, Box 5687, Harlem, Iowa 51593-1187, or call 800-477-3974, or e-mail VIBEcustomerservice@vibemedia.com. Please print name and address clearly. VIBE cannot be responsible for unsolicited materials. VIBE is a trademark of VIBE Media Group, LLC.



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- A.** Most men see results with their first dose and increasing results over 60 - 90 days.
- Q.** Are the results permanent?
- A.** For most men, if Xomax is taken continuously for three to four months followed by a maintenance program the results are permanent.
- Q.** How much growth can I realistically expect?
- A.** Up to 5 inches or more with an increase in width of 50%
- Q.** Is Xomax natural?
- A.** Xomax is 100% natural, safe and Doctor recommended for those looking for advanced penis enhancement, plus Xomax has no side effects.
- Q.** What makes Xomax the #1 natural penis enhancement formula?
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- Q.** Is Xomax guaranteed to work?
- A.** Xomax is 100% GUARANTEED! If you're not completely satisfied, return the bottle(s) within two months to receive a refund. Men now have an effective way to increase the size of their penis. Why pay for imitations that will not solve the problem? You may spend a little more on Xomax, but the results will be worth it! You often get what you pay for. So remember that the genuine ingredients in Xomax are GUARANTEED to work! Order today -the best money can buy!

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20Q

1. Weren't the scathing outros on **50 Cent's** "Funeral Music" and **Cam'Ron's** "Curmmrlis" better than the rhymes on the two dis tracks?
2. If **Ray J's** sex tape with **Kim Kardashian** helps sell his next album, how many other artists will "leak" their precious moments?
3. Aren't you hoping next month's **2007 NBA Finals** are better than the **NBA All-Star 2007** game?
4. Is her steely sexiness the reason we're feeling *The Closer's* (TNT) **Gina Ravera**?
5. What are you expecting to learn from **Donda West's** new book, *Raising Kanye* (Pocket)?
6. Can you explain why **50 Cent** and **Olivia's** 2005 hit "Candy Shop" is still a top-selling ring tone two years after its release (and why the duo's "Best Friend" has been ringing phones like crazy for more than a year)?
7. Even if they never blow up, don't you respect the hustle of North Carolina's **Little Brother**?
8. Who will have more hits by the end of '07: **will.i.am** or **Polow Da Don**?
9. Which highly anticipated and oft-delayed mixtape do you think will surface first: the third installment of **Clipse's** *We Got It For Cheap* or **Joe Budden's** *Mood Muzik*?
10. Whose bright idea was it to start a Web site called *niggaspace.com*?
11. Didn't former NBA point guard **Tim Hardaway** tarnish his legacy when he said, "I hate gay people," on a sports talk-radio show?
12. Are grills (or is it griltz?) finally on their way out now that rappers like **Mike Jones** and **Chamillionaire** are out and about without diamonds in their mouths?
13. Isn't HBO's *Entourage* one of the **best shows** on TV right now?
14. Are you as surprised as we are that **Lumidee**, nearly the ultimate one-hit wonder with 2003's "Never Leave You (Uh Oooh, Uh Oooh)," is back on the scene with her new album, *Unexpected* (TVT)?
15. Isn't Mercedes' new, ultraluxe **Ocean Drive** concept stepping on the toes of their premium Maybach brand?
16. Can you believe it's been 30 years since the premiere of **Alex Haley's** *Roots* miniseries?
17. Are we ever going to hear another **Mase** album?
18. Any chance Dallas Mavericks owner **Mark Cuban** owns the new T-Mobile Sidekick 3 designed by Miami Heat's **Dwyane Wade**?
19. Did **Swizz Beatz** really just resurrect **Bone Thugs-N-Harmony's** career?
20. How soon can we expect this year's **summer anthem** to hit radio?



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